

FEATURE
PLAYSTATION
Ten years on and it still can't be underestimated

PREVIEW
MATRIX ONLINE
Welcome to the real world

THIS TIME IT'S WAR

Samus goes head-to-head with Halo 2, Killzone and GTA: San Andreas

180 PAGES FULL OF THIS SEASON'S BEST GAMES

REVIEWED

HALO 2 [XB] KILLZONE [PS2] PRINCE OF PERSIA: WARRIOR WITHIN [PS2/XB/GC/PC] FOOTBALL MANAGER [PC] THE URBZ [PS2/XB/GC/PC/GBA] THE GETAWAY: BLACK MONDAY [PS2] GHOST RECON 2 [PS2/XB] PAPER MARIO: THE THOUSAND YEAR DOOR [GC] GTA: SAN ANDREAS [PS2]


eMag



"Ten years?!" may well have been Paul's stunned response upon being reunited with Martin Blank in *Grosse Point Blank* – it also mirrors just how incredulous we feel as the PlayStation notches up its first decade.

Launched on 3 December 1994 and originally described by Sony as its most important product since the Walkman, in its first month the PlayStation sold a staggering 300,000 units. Ten years later, the PlayStation brand is now so embedded into the public's consciousness that for many it has become synonymous with all consoles, irrespective of origin.

Opinion is divided as to the true impact of Sony's console – some argue that the PlayStation has singularly revitalised the console market and turned videogames into a mass-market phenomenon, while others feel that it has become home to a glut of substandard games that have divided the gaming community. One thing is certain: few could have foreseen its continuing dominance, now few would dare bet against it.

Simon Phillips,
Group Editor


Ooh! Does this mean we
issue of ga


get to read the latest
mestm, Sam?

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FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS

TWO IN A MILLION

SAN ANDREAS AND HALO 2 BREAK SALES RECORDS

The games industry is commanding respect from all sectors of the entertainment world since *GTA: San Andreas* and *Halo 2* broke sales records across the globe.

First to be released, *GTA: San Andreas* shattered records in the UK by selling 677,000 copies in its first weekend on sale, and selling a million in just nine days. The game now holds records for the most units sold in an opening weekend, fastest selling game, fastest to reach a million and is currently the fourth biggest selling PS2 title in the UK ever.

Looking at it in gross revenue terms, *San Andreas* would have generated £24 million in the UK alone in its first weekend, with projected worldwide figures looking to be around the £106 million mark. If a movie were to gross this in its opening weekend, it would be regarded as an instant classic.

Rockstar revealed it is "very pleased with the global retail sales of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*," while Roger Bennett, director general of industry trade body Elspa, said: "Congratulations to Take 2 and Rockstar – expectations have been brilliantly surpassed."

Not content to let *San Andreas* reap all the glory, or let the imbalance of installed hardware get in the way, *Halo 2* has performed incredibly in the US and Canada, out-performing all previous games by selling 2.4 million units in these regions in just one day and grossing a massive $125 million (around £68 million) in sales.

Halo 2 marked the biggest 24 hours in entertainment retail history – not even box office blockbusters such as *Spider-Man 2* or *The Matrix Reloaded* made as much in their first day. In addition, *Halo 2* beat that weekend's box office favourite, *The Incredibles*, by a considerable margin. The movie took $70.5 million in three days compared to *Halo 2*'s $125 million in just 24 hours.

"The first 24 hours of *Halo 2* sales have taken our breath away," said Microsoft's vice president of Xbox marketing and publicity, Peter Moore. "Across North America, 2.4 million copies of the game were sold, representing $125 million in cash-register receipts. It's no longer just a huge game for us, but has become a seminal milestone for the entire industry."

THE HALO EFFECT

HUGE SALES OF HALO 2 AND SAN ANDREAS ARE GREAT NEWS, BUT WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE INDUSTRY?

PSTWO TO THE POWER THREE

Aided by the release of the fastest selling PlayStation2 game ever, sales of the slimline PS2, dubbed PStwo, tripled what the original hardware was selling. Around 50,000 consoles were eagerly bought when the machine was released, boosting the PS2's sales way beyond the Xbox, which itself has received a boost in sales over the past few months and saw a seven per cent increase in the week in which the PStwo was launched. As for the GameCube, things aren't looking so good, with Nintendo's machine being outsold 17 to one by the PStwo. Still, at least Nintendo can take comfort in the success of the Game Boy Advance SP, which has experienced a recent sales rise of 31 per cent. The question is, though, with such a reliance on the handheld market, how will Nintendo fare once Sony has released its PSP?

A DATE WITH THE STREETS

An agreement between distribution company Gem and publisher Take 2 to ensure the street date for *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* was adhered to has been considered a massive success by everyone involved, with almost all retailers sticking to the street date. "So few people failed to participate," said Paul Donnelly, managing director for Gem, in an interview with trade magazine *MCV*. There were reports that online retailers were sending the game out prematurely, with some customers claiming to have been sent the game three days early, though this has been disputed by Gameplay's Andy Mee who told *MCV*, "We didn't break the street date. We rigidly stick to them. Games are shipped on Wednesday as the majority arrive at their destination after two days." Following the success of the street date agreement, retailers are hopeful for the future, with Alex Croft, buying director for Game, saying, "I hope this is a sign of things to come. There is a very real intent here to make things work."

OUR TWO CENTS

Thanks to *San Andreas* and *Halo 2* proving that blockbuster games have the power to generate revenue in excess of movies, we're once again prompted to consider how far videogames have come and how far they have yet to go. Without obvious celebrity figureheads, videogames earn nowhere near as much media attention as the latest films or music releases do, yet in terms of revenue have proved they can continuously out-perform any other form of entertainment vying for the cash of the same audience. With new releases costing around £40 compared to the cheaper prices of music albums, DVDs and cinema tickets, the fact so many customers are choosing to buy games to the point where the combined gross is more than new cinema releases shows how important games now are. This is something we've seen develop for some time and now we're waiting for videogames to start getting the recognition they deserve.

"**HALO 2** HAS MARKED THE **BIGGEST 24 HOURS IN ENTERTAINMENT** RETAIL HISTORY – NOT EVEN CINEMATIC **BLOCKBUSTERS SUCH AS SPIDER-MAN 2** OR THE MATRIX RELOADED MADE AS MUCH IN THEIR FIRST DAY"

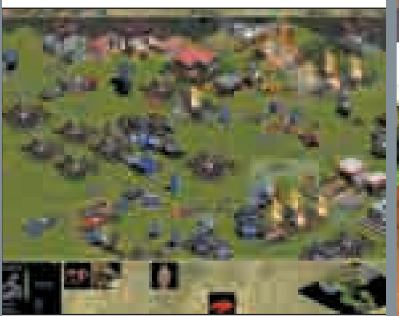
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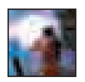
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



MICROSOFT GOES MOBILE

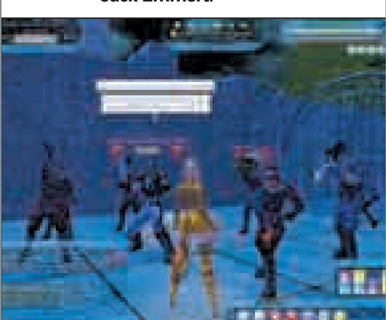
Microsoft, developing for the Gizmondo? Apparently so, although it's not what you think. Having signed a deal with the PC gaming division at Microsoft Game Studios, the Gizmondo will host a number of converted PC titles such as *Age Of Empires* and *MechAssault* (not surprising, considering the handheld runs on Windows architecture), with Rare's *It's Mr Pants* also in the pipeline. "We welcome Microsoft's enthusiasm and look forward to carrying the titles on our pocket-sized console," said Carl Freer, MD of Gizmondo Europe.



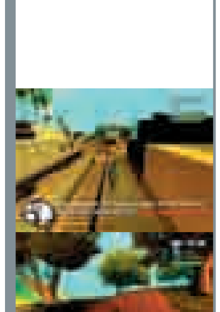


AN AWARD FOR BRAVERY

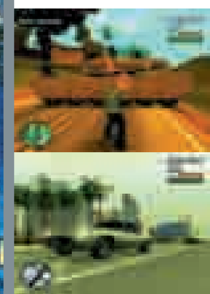
The success of MMORPG *City Of Heroes* continues, with the game picking up two awards at *Billboard* magazine's Digital Entertainment Awards last month. The game, due in Europe early next year, beat the likes of *Knights Of The Old Republic* and *Prince Of Persia* to the title of PC or Console Game of the Year, as well as landing the Multiplayer Game of the Year award. "This is a very pleasant surprise," said *City Of Heroes*' lead designer Jack Emmert.







Some gamers had to wait for their cap-popping action.



Hold-ups were perhaps inevitable with such a big title.

HIGH SALES CREATE CASUALTIES OF PRE-ORDER CULTURE

TROUBLE IN PARADISE

The massively high sales of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* brought with them a wave of ill-feeling from consumers and a new distrust of the 'pre-order culture' surrounding big-name releases.

The biggest games retailer in the UK, Game, has come under fire from customers unhappy with the ways in which their orders have been handled. Gaming forums are rife with complaints, with one of the most common issues being insufficient stock to fulfil all pre-orders; some unhappy punters have claimed stores take excess orders fully aware many can't be fulfilled, simply to get additional custom and hope that unfortunate buyers will accept apologies and wait for additional stock to arrive.

Another recurring complaint, and one that can be substantiated, is the case that some pre-orders that were not collected almost immediately were sold to customers who hadn't reserved, without notifying the pre-ordering customer that there was a time limit for collecting the game. Game has released a statement responding to its customers' grievances. "We are very disappointed to hear that a small number of customers did not receive their pre-ordered copy of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*," it says. "Our customer service department is currently responding to any correspondence received regarding the matter. On the busiest and biggest release night of the year so far, 99.9 per cent of pre-orders were successful and customers went away with the game they had reserved. On the very rare occasion that the system didn't work, we are correcting the mistake with the relevant customers."

One such customer is David Steer, who pre-ordered his copy of *San Andreas* at a Game store in Hammersmith. When he went to collect it he found it had been sold. In a letter to Martin Long, chief executive for Game, Steer expressed his annoyance, writing: "I work shifts and therefore it was very difficult to collect my reserved copy on the Friday of release… I was not unduly concerned as I had a guaranteed reserved copy. However, when I went to collect the game this morning I was told that I should have picked up my copy by Saturday evening. I would like to stress that at *no point* was I informed that my reserved copy should be collected within a specific time frame."



"ON THE **BIGGEST RELEASE** NIGHT OF THE YEAR SO FAR, **99.9 PER CENT** OF PRE-ORDERS WERE **SUCCESSFUL** AND CUSTOMERS WENT AWAY WITH THE **GAME THEY HAD RESERVED**"

GAME STATEMENT

Game accepts that in this instance its pre-order policy was not followed by staff and has responded to Steer's letter. "Our policy on deposit pre-orders is to contact customers when the stock has arrived, and to hold the game for 48 hours, which you should have been advised of at the time of pre-order," explained David McGreevy, head of customer service for Game. "I am very sorry to say that neither procedure was followed in this instance."

While a few hiccups on high-profile releases are unsurprising, this does raise questions about retail practices at all games shops. Roger Bennett, director general of Elspa, wants action taken if unscrupulous stores are discovered. "Retailers have legal obligations to conform to acceptable trading practice with the public" he explains. "I have no evidence that is the case, but if [bad practice] is occurring, then we would hope that retailers will ensure it is stopped in the future. Consumers can complain to Trading Standards if they believe they have been the victim of unacceptable practice."

Ultimately, this is a question of trust between customers and retailers, and this will break down unless shops act to restore consumer faith.

WHERE'S MY GAME?

As well as botched pre-orders in shops, many customers were left disappointed after websites suffered stock shortages. Despite offering better deals than the high street and taking as many pre-orders as possible, smaller websites aren't given as much stock as larger companies like Game and invariably disappoint some buyers – something to think about next time you find yourself desperate for an upcoming big seller.



ARGONAUT STORY

SAN STIRS TROUBLE AS DEVELOPER CLOSES DOORS

It might be a shame to see a reputable developer shut its doors for good, but considering the continuing reports of financial difficulty leading up to the event, the recent closure of Argonaut Games will come as no great shock. The developer, as **games™** reported last month, had already warned that delays in the signing of key development contracts meant it could only continue operating for an "extremely limited period". It finally fell into the hands of administrators early last month, marking the end of nearly two decades of game development for the company.

Unfortunately, the fallout of the shutdown has been less than amicable, with shareholders complaining of underhand dealings following former CEO Jez San's resignation and subsequent purchase of Argonaut's two external studios, Just Add Monsters and Morpheme. Many are questioning the timing of the purchase, which occurred just days after San left the company, and shareholders have come together to demand that City regulators are brought in to investigate exactly what went on.

Having moved in to secure a successful sale of the company's assets, the administrators have since confirmed that Argonaut's employees have all been made redundant, both from the developer's main studio in Edgware and one in Sheffield, due to "lack of funds to continue operations".

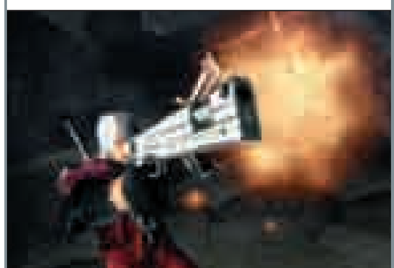
Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



FILMMAKERS MAY CRY

With the last two *Resident Evil* movies proving fairly successful, Capcom is expanding into the world of Hollywood with films based on three of its most popular franchises. Along with the big-screen version of *Onimusha* due in 2006, the Japanese developer also has plans for a live-action take on the *Devil May Cry* series, as well as a feature-length version of *Mega Man* following the character's success as the star of his own animated TV show. Details are sparse, but the thought of Dante getting his own movie is enough to get us salivating.



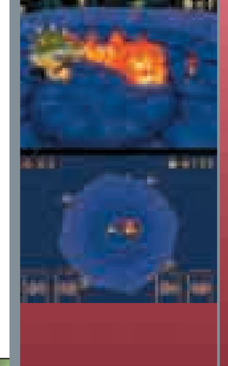


DON'T WANT MY MTV

Interactive technology is now more popular than television, according to a recent survey. The research, conducted among almost 1,000 people on behalf of British Telecom, indicates that over half of those questioned would give up watching TV to play online games, while approximately 77 per cent of 11- to 16-year olds would rather play videogames than a traditional board game. "Consumers are looking for more interaction when it comes to home entertainment," said Duncan Ingram, managing director at BT Retail.



We'll soon be seeing plenty of quality DS titles – but at what price?



Once again, UK gamers will be paying more for their stuff.

DS WILL COST THE UK THAT LITTLE BIT MORE

THE PRICE IS WRONG

Industry sources have revealed details of the UK release date and price of Nintendo's new DS handheld. It is now predicted that a late March 2005 arrival is likely, and that the machine will cost £129.99 (€186).

Although this price may seem reasonable, it looks like UK gamers will be hard done by yet again. The handheld has just gone on sale in the US for $149.99 – which translates to just £80. For the sake of comparison, Nintendo is currently selling the GameCube for $99 in the US (£53, or €76), whilst in Europe the hardware retails at €99. The GBA SP remains comparatively more expensive, retailing for just $79 in the US (£42, or €60) and also costing 99 in Europe.

Nintendo, however, is remaining tight-lipped about pricing. "We have not announced any details regarding the price of the Nintendo DS in the UK or Europe," said Nintendo PR Rob Saunders. "Everything published to date is entirely speculative and we will be announcing our plans for Nintendo DS in Europe closer to the European launch next year."

The low US price is no doubt partly responsible for the fact that one of the largest videogame retail chains in the States, GameStop, had to halt its pre-order campaign a month early, indicating that the chain had sold out its launch allocation long before the release date. It wasn't only GameStop that struggled to cater for the demand for the DS – EBGames, also announced that it was nearing its allocation limit. Could it be that Nintendo underestimated the demand for its handheld?

Despite the machine's reportedly higher price in the UK, gamers aren't likely to be deterred and it's expected that we'll be seeing a similar situation here, with many high-street retailers and websites having to stop taking pre-orders due to high demand.

It's thought that 20 to 25 games will accompany the UK launch in March, with another 40 to 50 titles being made available in the following weeks. Nintendo was on target to launch the DS hardware in the US, but with six titles being available at launch and only an extra six titles to be available by Christmas, the idea of 40 to 50 games being available in Europe next spring seems a little optimistic.

HALF-LIFE 2 TO HIT THE ARCADES

WHAT A LIFE



Half-Life 2's success was assured long before its launch, and it looks to continue following the news that Valve's FPS will soon arrive in Japanese arcades. The game is planned to be released in mid-2005, and will be seen on Taito's Type-X machines with a special cockpit-style set-up and full 5.1 surround sound to really bring the experience to life.

One of the key selling points of the arcade *Half-Life 2* will be the introduction of the online multiplayer modes. According to Taito, gamers will be able to connect to and challenge other gamers who are playing the game across Japan. Two online modes will be available – a standard Battle mode and a co-operative Mission mode, which will allow you to take on the game with another gamer.

The online play will be made possible thanks to Taito's Net Entry System (Netsys), which will also feature in arcade titles such as *Zoid Infinity* and *Battle Gear 3* in the near future. One of the advantages of Netsys is its ability to store data at server level, which will allow gamers to recall their profile from any connected arcade machine.

Details on the control set-up or the exact date we can expect to see these machines – either in Japan or the rest of the world – have not yet been confirmed.



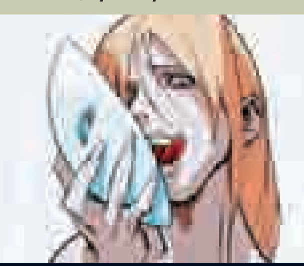
The ability to play online should make for a great arcade experience.

games™ THE TOP FIVE
WHERE'S YOUR GAME FACE?



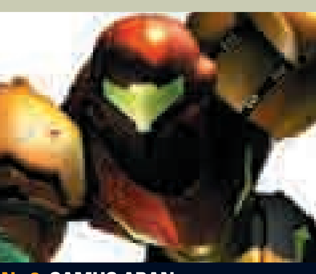
No.5 SHY GUY

Hush hush, eye to eye



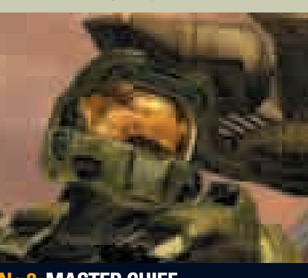
No.4 VEGA

'No! Not my beautiful face!"



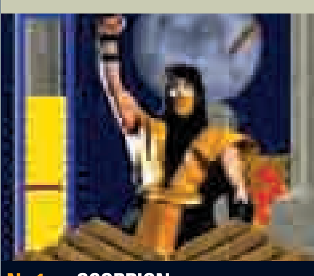
No.3 SAMUS ARAN

At least she's pretty underneath



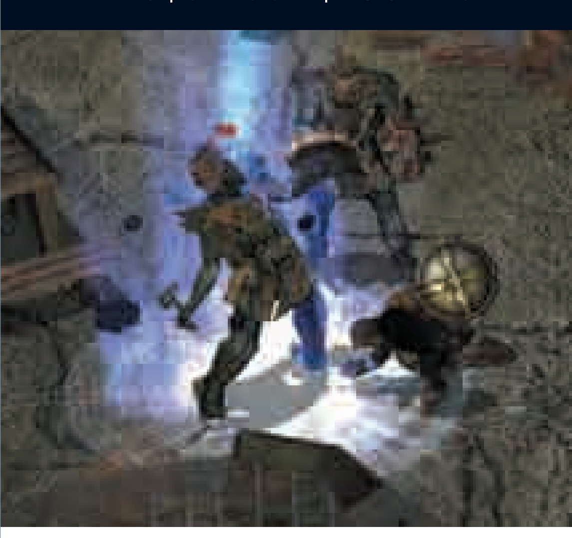
No.2 MASTER CHIEF

Too ugly, even for the Covenant



No.1… SCORPION

Flawless victory indeed



TIGER SNARES WARTHOG

GIZMONDO TO GAIN A NICE RANGE OF WARTHOG TITLES

British developer Warthog has agreed a deal with Tiger Telematics, the parent company of Gizmondo Europe, which will result in all of the studio's subsidiaries being taken over by the handheld manufacturer.

The deal was certainly a surprise, and you have to wonder what Warthog is hoping to achieve. The announcement was made to the stock market in early November without the approval from Warthog's shareholders due to an apparent need to complete the deal very quickly.

"This transaction represents the best available outcome for the company and its shareholders," says Warthog. "The board has sought to complete this transaction as rapidly as possible because the group has continued to face difficult trading conditions."

Tiger Telematics, a US firm that was best known for the creation of devices such as global positioning systems before launching the Gizmondo, will be taking on all of the subsidiaries of Warthog, as well as all its debts after paying $8.1 million. This amount will be divided into $1.13 million in cash and 497,866 shares in Tiger Telematic's stock.

The aim of the buyout, from Gizmondo Europe's point of view at least, is to give the company access to a huge library of existing titles that can be ported onto its new platform, the Gizmondo.

It's unknown how this will effect Warthog's other projects or whether this sale will lead to yet more redundancies for the company.

Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



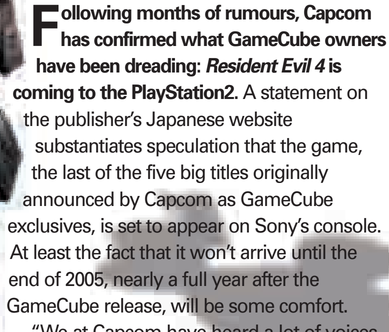
BACK OF THE NET

Pats on the back are due at Sega and Sports Interactive, with *Football Manager 2005* (SI's first management simulation since its split with Eidos) becoming one of the five fastest-selling PC games ever. The game, which entered the All-Formats Chart at number three, is now the one of four titles by Sports Interactive in the top five of the fastest-selling PC titles, with only *The Sims 2* standing out from the otherwise football management-heavy list. Of course, with *Half-Life 2* only a week away as we write, that list may change very soon.



HONOUR THY MOTHER

A Chinese mum wound up in court last month when her 11-year-old son sued her for refusing to buy him a computer. The woman told her son that if he got more than 94 per cent in his school work, she would buy him a PC. However, when he did this, she said she couldn't afford the machine after all. The boy went to court to make his mother honour her verbal agreement, where the judge found in his favour.



PS2 owners will now get to share these gruesome scenes.



CAPCOM'S LOVE FOR THE GAMECUBE COMES TO AN END

THE HORROR, THE HORROR

Following months of rumours, Capcom has confirmed what GameCube owners have been dreading: *Resident Evil 4* is coming to the PlayStation2. A statement on the publisher's Japanese website substantiates speculation that the game, the last of the five big titles originally announced by Capcom as GameCube exclusives, is set to appear on Sony's console. At least the fact that it won't arrive until the end of 2005, nearly a full year after the GameCube release, will be some comfort.

"We at Capcom have heard a lot of voices from our loyal customers all over the world, requesting that *Resident Evil 3* be expanded to other platforms as well," read the announcement. "We would like to assure all our loyal customers that we will continue to strive to develop *Resident Evil 4* to feature the best possible characteristics for each of the console platforms." Not surprisingly, these comments have sparked debate about the game also making an appearance on the Xbox in the near future, although representatives at Capcom are, at the time of going to press, neither confirming nor denying the possibilities of such a conversion.

Of course, the wider issue here isn't so much *Resident Evil 4*, but the changing attitudes within Capcom itself. Clearly, the decision to port *Resident Evil 4* should be seen as a strategic move on behalf of the company's shareholders, who no doubt expect big returns on the game's success. However, the *Resident Evil 4* announcement also acknowledges that the games industry has seen "steady growth focusing around the US as well as the European markets" in recent years, which many have suggested may see Capcom shifting its focus away from Japan into other markets (noticeable in the release of *Resident Evil 4* in the US ahead of Japan), in turn leading to further development on Microsoft's Xbox, the only current console not particularly favoured by the company's shareholders.

Talk is already rife about whether Capcom will decide to move previous GameCube-only titles onto other formats, following both this announcement and the recent release of *Viewtiful Joe* for the PS2. Games such as the original *Resident Evil* remake and *Resident Evil Zero* have already been mentioned more than once, although again Capcom has yet to confirm or deny the possibilities of multiformat releases for either game.

XBOX 2 HAS ITS CHIPS

ATI GIVES SUPPORT TO XBOX 2 DEVELOPERS

Hardware development for Microsoft's follow-up to the Xbox reached a new milestone recently, with graphics technology expert ATI confirming that it has completed work on the R500 graphics chipset that will lie at the heart of the machine.

The R500, which ATI has admitted is comparable to the new R520 chips being used in its upcoming range of PC graphics cards, is based on Shader Model 3.0 – a highly advanced piece of technology currently used in Nvidia's top-of-the-range GeForce cards that gives developers greater control over lighting, shading and texturing – and has already been shipped to companies using current Xbox 2 development kits. Considering that such developers have, until now, been using Apple PowerMac G5 hardware based upon ATI's older graphics technology, it's likely that many firms will now have a busy time getting to grips with the new chipset in the run-up to next year's crucial E3.

The news of the shipment comes not long before January's Consumer Electronics Show, further fuelling speculation that Microsoft is planning to unveil the Xbox's successor at the Las Vegas event – something that many feel is a given, considering Bill Gates personally revealed the original machine at the same event in 2001.

SPECTOR MOVES ON FROM ION STORM

A GHOST IN THE NIGHT

The games industry saw another loss recently, as respected developer Warren Spector stepped down from his position of studio director at Ion Storm. Spector, best known for both his appearances at various development conferences and the creation of the popular *Deus Ex* franchise, was rumoured to be leaving the Texas-based developer at the Austin Games Conference back in September, although the announcement of his departure has still come as a shock to some.

"Warren has chosen to pursue personal interests outside the company," said a statement from British publisher Eidos, responsible for handling Ion Storm's output, "but he will continue to work for Eidos as an IP consultant. His insight and expertise is highly valued by Eidos, and the company looks forward to continuing its relationship with Warren in his new role."

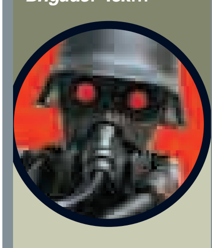
Spector was unavailable to comment about his plans although several guesses have been made as to what he'll do next. Some have suggested the veteran will be supporting Crystal Dynamics' development of the latest *Tomb Raider* game, while others have linked him with a move to Midway Studios Austin.



SEPARATED AT BIRTH

games™ tracks down those videogame lookalikes

Tut tut, Guerrilla – did you really think we wouldn't notice that the design for *Killzone*'s Helghast was 'influenced' by Mamoru Oshii's Japanese animation *Jin-Roh: The Wolf Brigade*? Tsk…





Spector will still be involved with the industry.



GAMES ROOM 101

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING

NO. 26: WHEN WILL I BE FAMOUS?

Fame in the games industry – is there room for it? We'd like to say yes, but only if it's in the right places. The most important cogs in this great machine are the people who actually make the games – the Shigeru Miyamotos, Peter Molyneux, Will Wrights and Warren Spectors of the world. These are the people who need to be rewarded, respected and ultimately recognised for their efforts. They do something important, something worthwhile; they further the industry that we so dearly love.

Conversely, there's nothing that gets our goat more than people with nothing to do with games creation trying desperately to cling to an industry reputation; those who feel that the fact they've played games before (perhaps on TV, we don't know) or worked on the odd magazine makes them a valuable contributor to the industry. It's sheer arrogance. That's why **games™** is as it is – there are no names on the work in this magazine, because we don't do what we do for fame or fortune – we do it because we love games and love writing. It's not about reputation or recognition; it's about a genuine enjoyment for what we do. Of course, the day that changes, feel free to take us outside and shoot us.



Miyamoto-san – perhaps one of the most recognised and respected games creators in the whole world. A legend.



Davydd Perry – the only Games Animal in the village. Legendary? Um, perhaps not.

Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING

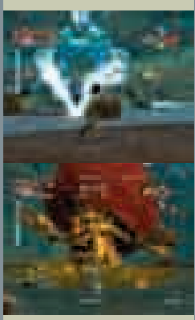


NICE AND BREEZY DOES IT

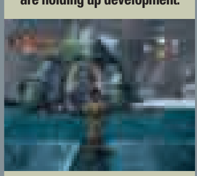
In a move that has surprised many, considering the success of its last title, *The Chronicles Of Riddick*, Swedish developer Starbreeze has chosen US publisher Majesco as its partner for its latest game. The untitled game, due to ship in 2006, is expected to appear on the next line of games consoles, although the developer has yet to indicate which format is likely to benefit from the project. "Majesco has a fine reputation in the development community for partnering with its developers to assemble a single, cohesive team dedicated to producing quality products," said Starbreeze CEO Johan Kristiansson. "We are excited to be working with them on creating content for the next generation of videogame systems."

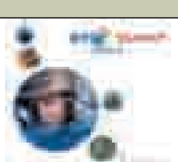


YET MORE DELAYS FOR XBOX'S PRIZE CATCH



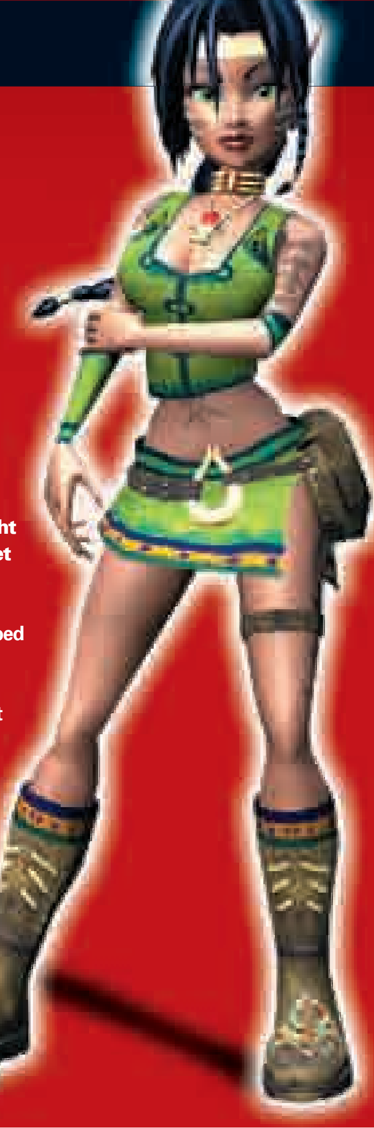
Leaves on the keyboard are holding up development.







RARE BY NAME & NATURE



With only one game to its credit since being bought by Microsoft in 2002, Rare's decision to delay yet another of its Xbox titles doesn't come as much of a surprise. This time it's *Kameo: Elements Of Power*, a game originally destined for the GameCube before Microsoft stepped in to buy the developer, and one that has seen numerous delays since its first showing at E3 2003.

"After a lot of thought and discussion, Rare and Microsoft Game Studios have decided to push back the launch of *Kameo: Elements Of Power* in order to incorporate several changes and new features," said a statement on Rare's website, admitting the delays would be "frustrating… to all those of you avidly following the game's progress".

The news has triggered speculation over the possibility of *Kameo* being switched to Xbox 2, although there's the bigger question of whether Microsoft is beginning to regret spending $375 million on the developer. Rare now has nothing due on the Xbox until at least March 2005, when *Conker: Live And Reloaded* should be released; though you have to wonder if a rehashed N64 title is enough to maintain the company's reputation.

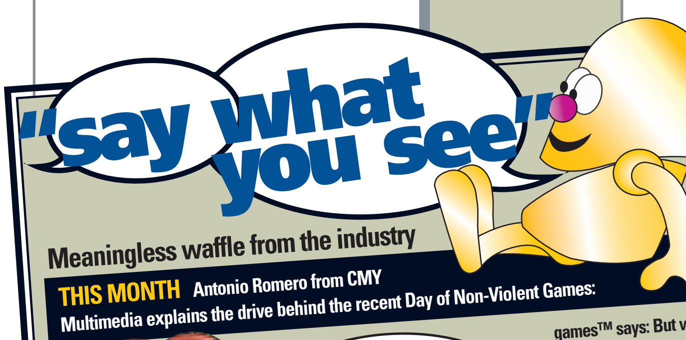
BT DEALS WITH IT

NEW OFFER GIVES GAMERS FREE ONLINE ACCESS

BT is hoping to entice more gamers online this Christmas by offering them free subscriptions and gaming equipment. The promotion, which began in mid-November, will allow new subscribers to BT Yahoo! Broadband to receive either a year's free Xbox Live (worth £59.99) or a PS2 Network Adapter (worth £16.99). To qualify for the offer, new users have to sign up for a year's subscription to the BT's service through its website, www.btyahoo.com/onlinegaming.

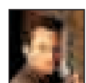
"Online console gaming on Xbox and PlayStation2 is one of the most exciting entertainment forms available to broadband subscribers, and we hope that this offer will encourage more people to give it a try," said Chris Jones, head of indirect consumer channels at BT. While it's not quite the permanent drop in broadband price that we might have hoped for in time for Christmas, there's no doubt that this new deal might at least convince a good few gamers to join up.

Unfortunately, there is a catch: the deal is only available to the first 6,000 new subscribers – 3,000 for each format – which leaves us wondering why BT would bother introducing such an offer if it's only going to benefit a small amount of people. It's certainly a start, considering the government's deadline for countrywide broadband uptake is swiftly looming, but we doubt it'll make the impact on the numbers that it should.



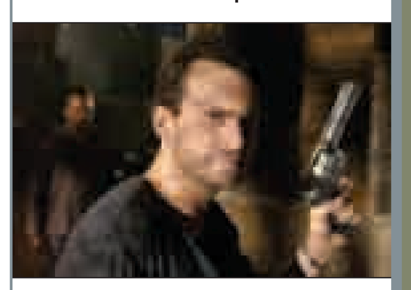
Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



ALONE AT THE PICTURES

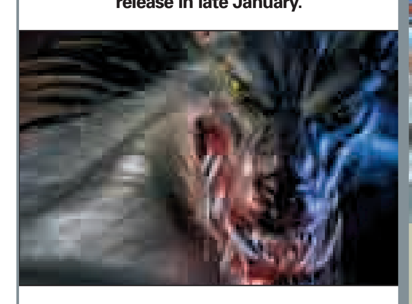
With game-based films all the rage, it's been revealed that the *Alone In The Dark* movie is due in US cinemas at the end of January 2005, with a European launch to follow if it proves successful. "I'm really happy that Lions Gate is releasing *Alone In The Dark*," said Uwe Boll, the film's director. "The game has millions of fans worldwide and our movie turns out as a very intelligent supernatural thriller with great actors and creatures." While we'd like to believe Boll, his previous film – a terrible movie based on Sega's *House Of The Dead* games – leaves us more than a little sceptical.

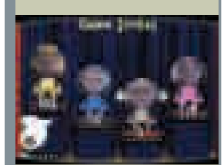




WISE FWOM YOUR GWAVE

Those of you looking forward to the revival of the *Altered Beast* franchise may be in for a long wait, thanks to Sega of America's decision to cancel the game's launch in the US. Despite the publisher claiming after the cancellation that it's trying to be 'more particular about the titles it ships in the US', the good news for European gamers according to a Sega Europe spokesman is that the game is still slated for release over here in early 2005, shortly after the Japanese release in late January.

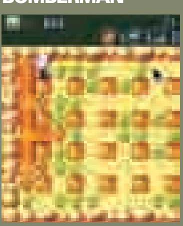




It's easy to see why the EyeToy is so successful. Look at all the fun we're having.



BOMBERMAN



Bomberman has seen action on pretty much every platform imaginable and in almost every case it has been a worthy purchase for anyone who has a supply of eager friends to hurl bombs at – and this version is no exception. Although the single-player worlds are fun enough to conquer, the series has always been about the multiplayer. Though this N-Gage version only supports two players, there's still plenty of multiplayer fun to be had over the five varied battle stages. This game's never going to get old.

SONY'S EYETOY PICKS UP ANOTHER AWARD

AN EYE FOR DESIGN

After picking up the games™ Best PS2 Game award for *EyeToy: Play* a few months ago, Sony's EyeToy has received yet more praise. The Japan Industrial Design Promotion Organisation, a Japanese group that encourages and rewards innovative design, has honoured the peripheral with a Good Design Award.

The award, which is sponsored by the Japanese Ministry of International Trade and Industry, recognised EyeToy in the category of Product Design as a product "expected to bring greater abundance to our lives", and with titles like *Sega Superstars* and *EyeToy: Play 2* causing more players than ever to drop their pads and start waving their arms around, it's easy to see why.

"The recognition and awards that the dedicated team at SCEE's London Studio have received for EyeToy over the past 18 months has been incredible," said Mike Haigh, director of development for both EyeToy and *SingStar*. "Following awards received in Europe and the US, we are extremely proud to accept this honour from Japan."

Since its launch back in July 2003, over 3.6 million EyeToy cameras have been sold worldwide – that's a lot of flailing arms.

THREE DIMENSIONAL GAMES ARRIVE ON MOBILES

O2 GOES INTO 3D

Mobile phone service provider O2 is taking the next step in phone-based gaming by providing mobile versions of *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow* and *Extreme Air Snowboarding* with an added third dimension. Real 3D graphics will feature in these new titles and this is likely to be just the beginning of many three-dimensional games that will soon be hitting our phones.

"By offering 3D games on the mobile, O2 is extending its commitment to making mobile gaming a more interactive, compelling and exciting experience," said Simon Dean, head of games for O2. "Following on from O2's successful launch of Bluetooth games in October, the addition of 3D Games to the O2 portfolio also reflects the ever-evolving mobile games market."

The move into three dimensions is a big step for mobile gaming, and will enable mobile game providers to provide the sort of content normally only seen on home consoles. "With the launch of 3D games on the mobile, O2 is ensuring that gamers' overall mobile gaming experience is as exhilarating and stimulating as possible, with the added advantage of offering the excitement of the game wherever, whenever," said Dean.

Although these new 3D titles are unlikely to provide any real competition for the Nintendo and Sony handhelds that are to be released early next year, it will be interesting to see whether these technologically advanced games will boost the popularity of mobile gaming.



Fully rendered characters will feature in O2's new snowboarding title.



THE FINAL FANTASY FRANCHISE HAS ALWAYS BEEN ABOUT EPIC ADVENTURES, SO WHAT BETTER PLACE TO SEE IT NEXT THAN ON THE SILVER SCREEN? WE CAUGHT UP WITH THE WRITER AND DIRECTORS OF ADVENT CHILDREN, THE NEW FINAL FANTASY FILM



"GENERALLY SPEAKING, GAMES HAVE SOME RULES AND LAWS THAT WILL LIMIT YOUR CREATIVITY"

TETSUYA NOMURA, DIRECTOR, SQUARE ENIX



TETSUYA NOMURA, TAKESHI NOZUE, KAZUNORI NOJIMA

SQUARE ENIX

It's been seven years since PlayStation owners were enchanted by the world of *Final Fantasy VII*. Seven years since Cloud took up his sword, since Cait Sith's betrayal and since that flower girl died. With fans eager to revisit Midgar it was inevitable the closing credits for *Final Fantasy VII* didn't mean the end of Cloud's story, but few guessed that the return would be a DVD release. *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* is a 70-minute movie focusing on Cloud's battle against Geostigma, a new adversary, Kadaj, and his own sense of loss and guilt. At the premiere of *Advent Children* at the Venice Film Festival, there were many questions to ask about this unusual turn in the popular series.

Heading up the project is director Tetsuya Nomura (favourite character: Cloud), *Final Fantasy VII*'s character designer and, more recently, *Kingdom Hearts*' director. Choosing his words carefully, Nomura explains why Square Enix decided to continue *Final Fantasy VII* as a movie and not a videogame. "The project in our department was to have a visual work production and not a game. It was not decided, 'Okay, we want to make a film out of *Final Fantasy VII*' but we just wanted to have a movie. And then we decided to base it on *Final Fantasy VII*. We decided *VII* because it was the one that the staff liked very much and wanted to put their energy into. And also it was the most well-known around the world."

Given that this is the 33-year-old's film debut, it's reasonable to expect that other movies influenced his work, but this isn't the case. "I didn't receive any influence from any specific movie," he says, surprised by the question. "From all the movies I was watching, 'I thought I want to make something different from this, something that is not there, I want to make it'. In this sense, I was influenced by movies."

Nomura says that working on *Advent Children* for the past 18 months has been creatively liberating. "Generally speaking the game has some rules and laws that will limit somehow your creativity, and when it comes to the movie I'm more free. The technical aspects [of games] bored me, so I could really produce something in the movie as I thought. In the game it's a little more difficult but in the movie it's easier to realise my thoughts."

If technical aspects bore Nomura, he must be thankful co-director Takeshi Nozue (favourite character: Vincent) is on board. Having worked on *Final Fantasy IX* as CG designer and *Final Fantasy X* as animation director, technical matters don't worry him and *Advent Children* is almost familiar territory. However, Nozue is keen to stress the differences in *Advent Children*. "Actually it's pretty different from *Final Fantasy X*," he says. "For example, our characters have big eyes and it's not really real but the expression is very real. The atmosphere is very much touchable."

Unlike Nozue, to declare *Advent Children* familiar territory for writer Kazunori Nojima (favourite character: Vincent) would be a mistake. Writing the script for *Final Fantasy X* and *X-2* provided almost 40 hours to tell the story. For *Advent Children*, tight storytelling within the confines of a film was tougher. "It was really, really hard," the softly spoken Nojima says. "I had to think about so many devices to keep inside of the short time and also this time I didn't have to write down the parts of the player, so it was maybe harder." For Nojima, the chance to tell Cloud's story once more was a big lure. "I was very happy to have the chance to continue with Cloud because my little boy's disappointment was 'Oh, Cloud is finished, I love this character' so I was very happy to keep on working with this character. At the same time, it's a very fashionable, smart and cool character so I wanted to keep faithful to this character and not to betray him."

The *Final Fantasy VII* juggernaut won't stop with *Advent Children* – upcoming mobile phone game *Before Crisis: Final Fantasy VII* and producer Shinji Hashimoto's promise that this universe "will be opened in two years" are confirmation of that. For now, the plan is to try to crack the film market once more, and following the applause in a darkened cinema in Venice when Nobuo Uematsu's famous ending theme stirred into life, it's clear that *Advent Children* marks an interesting period in Square Enix's evolution.

MIDAS TOUCH

NINTENDO'S POSITION AS KING OF THE HANDHELD MARKET SEEMS SECURE, BUT WITH SONY'S PSP ON THE HORIZON, CAN THE DUAL-SCREENED DS HELP NINTENDO KEEP ITS CROWN?

"The price is right, the experience is new, and as you'll see today, the games are absolutely fabulous." It might not have been on a par with the 'ass-kicking' quote that made Reggie Fils-Aime a cult Nintendo hero but it did succinctly sum up why we were at Nintendo's Gamers' Summit in Seattle – to get first-hand experience of Nintendo's DS by playing through a selection of its first games. With a small window of opportunity before the PSP makes its first impressions on the handheld market, the DS needs some strong titles to deliver on its promises of ground-breaking and fun gameplay.

Super Mario 64 DS, *The Urbz: Sims In The City* and *Spider-Man 2* are a batch of titles confirmed for launch and the hardware will come bundled with text messager, *Pictochat*, and a demo of *Metroid Prime: Hunters*. The event wasn't restricted to showcasing just these titles, however, and 17 games were on show, either encroaching on the 'absolutely fabulous' tag that Reggie used, or struggling to get noticed among the show-floor buzz (the uninspiring *Sprung* and *Asphalt Urban GT* being two overlooked titles). What all games did share was the way they highlighted the eagerness of developers to use the new DS technology in their software. We tried out the hardware at E3, so this was all about the games. Here's the round-up of what we saw…



TRIED & TESTED

GAME ONE

THE URBZ: SIMS IN THE CITY



UNWELCOME VISITOR TO DS CITY

'Same as the GBA version but with tacky mini-games' is how one observer described the DS iteration of *The Urbz* and, sadly, it's hard to disagree. Taking its cues from the Advance iteration, *The Urbz* has the same graphics, gameplay and isometric viewpoint as its underpowered brethren. This is no slur against GBA *Urbz* but alongside games that tried to test the water of the machine, DS *Urbz*'s lack of ambition stood out. The mini-games unique to this version are few and mediocre while the extra laboratory level isn't noteworthy. You can use the touch screen and stylus to draw paintings for your home but that's the only time that the DS' capabilities are stretched.

"THIS SHOWS HOW THE DS COULD BE ABUSED BY LAZY ADDITIONS THAT DON'T EXPLOIT ITS POTENTIAL"

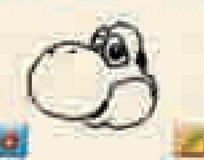
One real innovation is the ability to create pets to accompany you throughout the game, although you need to get through the mini-games to unlock further items for your animal friend – EA's decision to bury the only genuinely interesting addition under a deluge of tiresome mini-games is a curious one. *The Urbz* shows how the DS could be abused by lazy additions that don't exploit its potential. But this game was the exception at the show and, hopefully, laziness will be the exception rather than the rule.

VERDICT
LAZY, UNAMBITIOUS AND UNREMARKABLE



Having a Sim pet is a nice idea, but it can't save *The Urbz*.





Nintendo hopes a mix of nostalgia and innovation will entice fans old and new.

GAME TWO

SUPER MARIO 64 DS



GAMING ON THE MOVE

IT'S A GAME OF TWO HALVES…

The clue to this game is in its title – this is a reworking of the classic N64 platformer, with new characters and abilities introduced into the old *Super Mario 64* world. Typically, characters all have unique abilities and power-ups will affect each one differently – Yoshi breathes fire when he picks up a Fire-Flower while Mario puffs up like a ball. These minor differences change the way you approach the game and while the excellent level design will entice newcomers, these alterations play on memories for those who completed the original. Mini-games have been included to while away the time and those we saw rivalled even *Wario Ware Inc.*

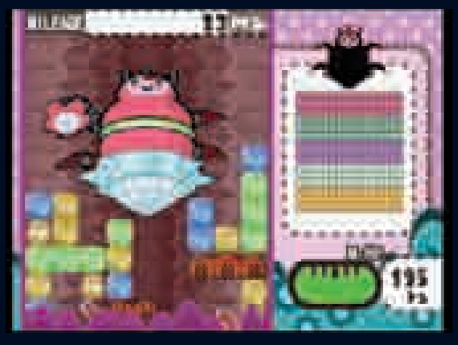
However, even with the limited time to play *Super Mario 64 DS*, it was long enough for a problem to emerge – no-one who played it seemed entirely happy with the controls. The D-pad is a poor substitute for an analogue stick and having the camera controls on the touch-screen isn't immediately intuitive either, requiring your right thumb to abandon the buttons to fiddle with the view. Again, the level design will probably win over those who haven't played *Super Mario 64*, but mini-games aside, it seems Nintendo is trying too hard to hammer a square peg into a round hole.



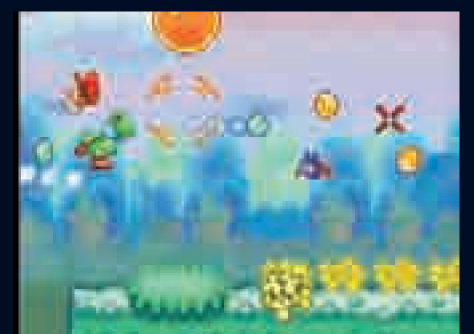
VERDICT
GREAT MINI-GAMES, WORRYING CONTROLS

MORE HOPEFULS

The other DS games we got our hands on



MR DRILLER: The dual screen means a new mode, Pressure Driller, is introduced – a giant drill appears on the top screen that grinds down to catch out slow players. Otherwise it's the usual bright and buoyant *Mr Driller* formula, working well on the twin screens.



YOSHI'S TOUCH: Draw clouds on the bottom screen to help Baby Mario float down to Yoshi and to help Yoshi avoid the obstacles in his path. However, Yoshi can stubbornly refuse to climb on freshly drawn clouds, which leads to unwelcome difficulty spikes.



SPIDER-MAN 2: The touch screen is reduced to sub-boss mini-games (which are as intrusive as they sound) and the ability to switch moves during combat, which actually works rather well. That aside, this is a standard platformer relying on its licence to sell.

TRIED & TESTED

GAME THREE

METROID PRIME: HUNTERS



TAKING ON BOARD E3'S LESSONS

Much derided for its dubious control scheme at E3, *Metroid Prime: Hunters* has undergone surgery and emerged with one seemingly minor change. When you tapped the screen at E3, Samus would automatically fire; now firing has now been mapped to a shoulder button, with the touch screen only used for aiming and jumping when double-tapped. This system makes much more sense and it's only once you begin to play through the opening levels that you appreciate the difference this alteration makes. A *Hunters* demo will come with the hardware and will provide the first taste of how the DS can renovate handheld games. Aiming is tricky at first but the system of touching the bottom screen according to where the enemies are on the top screen is just as accurate as an analogue stick, if not more so.

"ALL THE HALLMARKS OF METROID PRIME ARE HERE, SO THE FOCUS WILL BE ON THE CONTROL SYSTEM"

All the hallmarks of *Metroid Prime* have made it into this game, from the Morph Ball to the visor interface, so the focus will be on how well the controls work. The demo will also let you play deathmatches using the Wi-Fi capabilities. While there's no lag in this mode, there's a greater tendency to jump by accident due to the faster pace and the need to constantly fine tune aiming. Even so, it's hard to see this not setting the standard for future FPS titles on the DS.

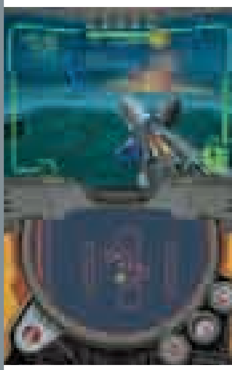


VERDICT

SURE-FIRE HIT FOR NINTENDO



It takes a while to get used to steering with the stylus.



If this is typical of what can be done with FPSs on the DS, then we're happy with that.

GAME FOUR

RIDGE RACER DS



THE CONTROVERSIAL GAME OF THE SHOW

While perhaps one of the more predictable games on show in terms of how it used the DS (map and steering wheel on the lower screen for stylus control), *Ridge Racer DS* divided opinion. Some embraced the steering mechanism, where drawing left and right would determine how far your car would turn in that direction. Others preferred using the thumb strap option, while a fearful minority rejected both in favour of the old fashioned D-pad. That's understandable given *Ridge Racer*'s reliance on recycling old themes – the first level has been ported directly from the original arcade game while the *Pac-Man* textured car will reappear.

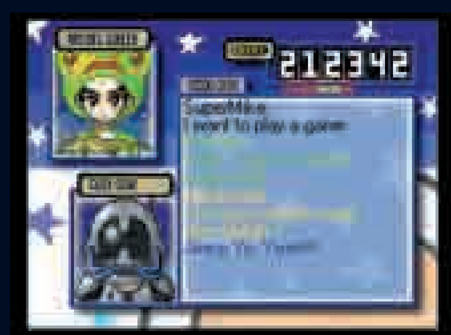
"RIDGE RACER IS NOT KNOWN FOR ITS SIMULATION ACCURACY, WHICH SUPPORTS THE STYLUS CONTROL"

Six-player races over Wi-Fi are the highlight of this version although it's not been confirmed if the map will show the other cars you're racing with (the version we played didn't, leading to confusion). Regardless, *Ridge Racer* is renowned for its over-the-top powerslides and drifting, not its simulation accuracy and this could count in its favour when weighing up the merits of its stylus control. As with other games on show that attempted something new with controls, time was needed to get to grips with the new technology. However, the mixed response to the game shows that last-minute tweaks could affect how *Ridge Racer DS* is received.

VERDICT

JURY STILL OUT ON THE CONTROL SYSTEM

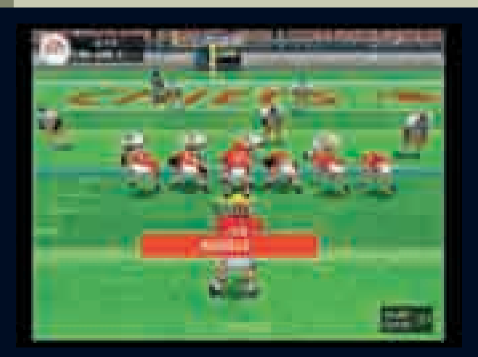
YET MORE HOPEFULS The other DS games we got to try out



PING PALS: In its present form, *Ping Pals* is little more than a spruced-up *Pictochat* with fancy avatars. What's interesting is the ability to upload a slimmed-down version to fellow DS units and that THQ may include this feature in its future titles.



FEEL THE MAGIC: XY/XX: Despite some novel ideas, such as the candle mini-game that requires you to blow on the touch screen, it's too slow to truly engage and highlights the faults of each mini-game. *Wario Ware*'s rapid-fire pace is needed here.



MADDEN NFL 2005: The visuals are muddled and the DS use restricted (real-time radar and play selection for bottom screen) but this is a competent title that's sure to do well. The use of replays and licensed music is a nice touch.

GAME FIVE

WARIO WARE INC

DUCKS, INSECTS AND KITTENS UNITE



Pulling toilet paper, chopping vegetables and lighting matches – if ever there was a game to embody Nintendo's ethos of accessibility and pick-up-and-play, then this is it. *Wario Ware Inc* is essentially a touch-screen update of the GBA version, with new mini-games designed to exploit the capabilities of the DS. Again, the games come at you in short, unrelenting bursts, giving you just enough time to guess at what's required. It speaks volumes that everyone who tried it was enjoying themselves instantly. Some of the games included cutting a rope to trap a duck, finding insects in the dark, blowing into someone's ear and freeing kittens from jars. Spilling more details would simply ruin the fun. While *Metroid Prime: Hunters* and *Super Mario 64 DS* were criticised by some for their unfamiliar controls, *Wario Ware Inc* was universally praised. It was also one of only two games on show to use the microphone, and definitely the only one where you had to aim a urinating boy to put out a fire.

VERDICT

MUCH LOVED AND MUCH TALKED ABOUT

GAME SIX

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR

SURPRISING MIS-HIT FROM EA



Tiger Woods PGA Tour was the first game to successfully renovate the control mechanism for golf games on consoles but EA's work is cut out if it wants to replicate similar success on handhelds. The bottom screen shows a swing bar that needs to be drawn through in order to take the shot. While this bar is in the shape of a golfer's swing, the actual drawing movement feels unnatural and there's inconsistency when the game judges where you've broken the swing. These are all indicators that the finished game could ship with a steep, awkward learning curve and not the type of intuitive gameplay that Nintendo wishes to promote. It's a greater shame when you consider the potential of a golf game on this handheld – particularly one that gets so many other elements right. Authentic names are included such as Vijay Singh and Justin Rose, with the presentation being typical EA – stylish, flashy and faultless. The camera also shows off what the DS is capable of under the bonnet, as it effortlessly tracks the ball throughout its flight. That is, of course, providing you haven't accidentally hit it all of ten yards again…

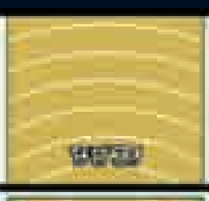
VERDICT

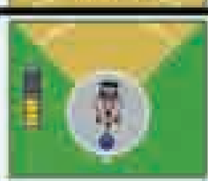
CONTROLS NEED MAJOR SURGERY





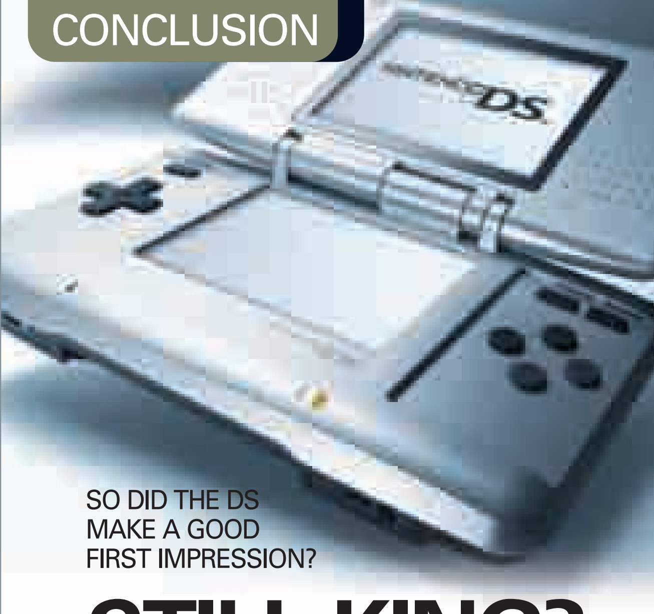
A game based on bog roll? It couldn't be bad if it tried.





Quite possibly the least strenuous hammer throw ever.

CONCLUSION



SO DID THE DS MAKE A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION?

STILL KING?

There's no question that the three strongest cards in Nintendo's opening hand have the faces of Mario, Wario and Samus on them. It's these three games that offer recognisable IP to veteran gamers and enticing gameplay for newcomers – the potential stumbling block is the drop-off in quality following The Big Three names. What is encouraging is how willing developers are to try something new and how vocal their support was at the show. It wasn't the usual clapping seals act either, as developers gushed about their ideas for the DS and how they planned to use the touch screen for future titles. The current games, they stressed, are baby steps towards bigger and better things. Nintendo simply has to hope that Mario, Wario and Samus will encourage interest among gamers while developers find their feet.

While it's difficult to judge the launch day reaction to the games themselves, Nintendo has done well preparing its handheld to hit the ground running. Priced at $149 and with region-free games on offer, there's certainly a lot of incentive to buy the DS. As for gameplay, the touch screen has the capacity to genuinely change the way games are played and the type of games that are played too – *Feel The Magic: XY/XX*, though poorly executed, certainly can't be accused of lacking ambition. Exclusive games needn't be done by signing publishing deals but simply by encouraging games that can only be made on the DS, one advantage Nintendo would do well to exploit. Considering the games available, the technology and Nintendo's track record with handhelds, it should be a successful launch and a good chance for early momentum before locking horns with Sony's PSP. Whether the DS takes a huge bite out of the PSP's market or its own GBA SP sales remains to be seen – Nintendo will need to navigate this minefield carefully while encouraging games that can only be made for the DS.





LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY EX-PATRIOT, THE SHAPE

"THE 45-CALIBRE GLOCK TRIED DAMN HARD TO JUMP IT FELT BAD, LIKE SOMETHING COULD GO WRONG.

"This is my buddy," said my neighbour to the middle-aged man behind the counter. "Hello," I smiled, too eagerly. "He's not a member," continued my neighbour. "Okay." "He's not an American citizen." "Okay." "He doesn't have any ID." "Okay." "And he can't find his passport…" "Okay." "…or visa." "Okay." "But he'd like to shoot today." "Okay," said the man, uncharacteristically. "You vouch for him?" "Yes."

And that's all it took. Five minutes later, I had a pile of semi-automatic weapons and many hundreds of really very large bullets. The world, which had conspired to keep firearms out of reach since I was about ten and decided there was nothing in the world I could ever want more than a gun, had finally, effortlessly, relented. We'd become so bored in the weeks before *Halo 2*, my friends and I, that we'd begun playing *Black Arrow*'s terrorist hunt with stupid rules. Mac-11s only. Sniper rifles with no back-up. The most popular variation had become 'Eagles': everyone equipped only with Desert Eagle handguns. Everyone likes the Desert Eagle. It's big, it's famous, and it's very good at killing things you point it at. Christ, one of these killed Neo. For a while, anyway.

With the handgun-hostile Mrs Shape far away in California, things degenerated, as they often do, into me doing something inadvisable. A friend offered me the chance to fire the real thing. Soon we were driving to the club with lots of guns on the back seat. On the way, he described how he and his friend, a veteran, had already planned where to go and what to do if the country's Second Amendment rights are ever revoked and the UN comes to take their guns away. I nodded an awful lot.

The indoor range had eight or so little booths facing down a concrete lane, a switch in each one to zoom your paper target in for inspection or back out for shooting. It was decided that I start small, with a 25-calibre Beretta, and work my way up. This was an ickle cute gun that a cop might keep in his sock for back-up. It was given to me loaded. I pointed downrange, flipped off the safety and braced. Pop! Did all that noise come out of this little gun? Was that me? I'd hit my menacing paper terrorist right in the forehead. Pop! Pop! Pop! Several holes grouped together in the chest. Even this little gun had more kickback than I'd expected, punching back between thumb and forefinger. Soon I'd fired a whole box of ammo.

Next came a 40-cal Glock. The Glock is a very square handgun made of clever polymers. There is no external hammer. It's always ready to fire. This was leagues away from the little Beretta. As I thumbed ammunition into the clip, the bullets seemed very big and shiny, and worryingly volatile. The sensory feedback was ten times that of the Beretta. Instead of a pop, it made a bang loud enough to make you wince even with



OUT OF MY HANDS ON EVERY SHOT. SO, NATURALLY, I KEPT ON DOING IT"

the protectors on. I felt the barrier of cinema that had always separated me from gunfire dissolve. I'd crossed over into some place I shouldn't be and it was both scary and exciting. Hot shells bounced off my cap or tinkled on the floor. I switched up to a 45-cal Glock, gradually acclimatising to my goal of the 50-calibre Eagle. The 45 was frightening. It emitted a huge bark with each pull of the trigger, made a 12-inch sphere of red-blue flame around the muzzle and, most alarmingly, tried damn hard to jump out of my hands on every shot. It felt bad, like something could go wrong. So, naturally, I kept doing it.

It was time for the massive Eagle, to my knowledge the most powerful handgun in the world. With some coaching, I put everything I had into resisting its recoil: hands tighter than ever, elbows locked, my strongest leg behind me. Firing it was an event. The sound filled the room, hitting me in the chest, as unholy recoil abruptly snapped my wrists back on themselves, spraining my right, all my effort hopeless to control 325 grains of exploding powder propelling a half-inch-wide lead slug away from me at 1,378 feet per second. I hopped around outside the booth grabbing my wrist and making faces, stopping only to grab my silver casing, still warm, from the floor.

"I couldn't have a gunfight with that," I told my friend. He pointed to the giant hole I'd made in my target's groin.

"There isn't going to be a gunfight," he said.

Many thanks



MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

Sunday Off-Licences



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

Reese's Big Cup



GOT ANY QUESTIONS FOR THE SHAPE? THEN JUST DROP HIM A LINE AT: theshape@comcast.net YOU MIGHT GET A REPLY… OR POSSIBLY JUST THE FINGER.

AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

TATER TOTS



The literal translation to 'potato children' does little to adequately convey the mechanically reclaimed texture of these golden brown reconstituted potato pellets. You know how the fantasy of a McDonald's hash brown often wildly exceeds the reality? Same thing.

US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar	PS2
2	Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	PS2
3	Star Wars Battlefront	LucasArts	PS2
4	Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War	SCEA	PS2
5	Men Of Valor	Vivendi	Xbox
6	Conflict: Vietnam	SCi	PS2
7	Star Wars Battlefront	LucasArts	Xbox
8	Shellshock: Nam '67	Eidos	PS2
9	Mortal Kombat: Deception	Midway	PS2
10	Madden NFL 2005	EA Sports	PS2

(Updated 10/11/04)



GTA: San Andreas

Tony Hawk's Underground 2



KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

"SAKURA TAISEN V: EPISODE 0 IS A VERY, VERY BAD GAME. IT'S BAD WERE WHEN YOU PUSHED THAT CRIPPLED KID DOWN

Lately, thanks to a ladyfriend who works at Sony, I'm playing lots of videogames. My ladyfriend doesn't play them herself because she doesn't like videogames. She was hired for her job because her boss, Mr. Kutaragi, felt the need to harness her clinical detachment from the medium. Some of the games she gives me are ones I'd never dreamt of playing. I play them, fascinated, feeling so clinically detached from them that I'm beginning to think Hideo Kojima is right when he tells me I'd make a good game designer.

One game that fascinated me with its this-is-not-your-kind-of-game-ness was *Sakura Taisen V: Episode 0* for PlayStation2. This is a very, very bad game. It's not bad like *Kingdom Hearts*; rather, it's bad like your mother said you were when you pushed that crippled kid down the stairs in third grade. The game is a ploy to make money; it is a sequel-prequel of minimum budget designed to keep its designers alive while they prepare the real deal; it is a paper-thin melee-action title with a cardboard-cutout-acted story that takes itself so seriously it's not funny. Sometimes the player makes choices that affect where long, cringing conversations head, though only barely.

There's a ten-year-old girl named Juanita in the story. Heroine Gemini Sunrise comes across Juanita at a troubled time and instantly takes her in; she later says, in a pivotal scene, "Juanita, I love you!" Her words soon disappear. The villains are chasing Juanita because of her 'miracle powers'. I promised to only play the game until the 'miracle powers' were revealed.

Well, four hours later, there it was – Juanita, at the age of ten, in the year 1927, was the last citizen to survive the Battle of Gettysburg. Now the Confederate Army is rising again (with the help of giant robots), and seeking Juanita to populate a 'new America'.

"Hold on for a second," thinks I, with controller in hand. "The Battle of Gettysburg wasn't fought in a city, dammit. It was fought on a field."

Says my ladyfriend, while reading a music magazine, "This is the first *Sakura Taisen* game they plan to sell in America. So they figured they'd set it in America, is why."

"Well, they need to get the history right."

"They bend Japanese history all the time in these stories."

"This isn't about Japan, though. It's American history."

She doesn't ready a reply. She goes back to the magazine. She's clinically detached, alright.

I wonder, though – enough to write about this Japanese free interpretation of American history in a British magazine – how much licence is required for a game about a cowgirl

Is this the face of the American civil war? Possibly.





TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON TWENTY SIX — BEING FROM TEXAS

(Keyword: 'gotsui' = 'robust', 'strapping', 'meat-on-bonesy')

Ore-sama wa KAUBOOI da!	Ah'm a cowboy!
Ore-sama wa daitouryou ni mezasu!	Ah wanna grow up to be the president!
Ee, Ore-sama no uma wa GOtTSUsugi hodo gotTSUuuUinJA!	Damn, mah horse is robust to the point of being almost *too* robust!
Maji da, Ore-sama no uma no GOtTSUsa yoku miterukai?!	Seriously – would you get a look at how damn robust mah horse is?!
KusoooO, kono gotTSuuul uma wa aburappokute goCHiill kuso wo shitanda…	Aw sheeeeyit, mah robust horse took one oily 'n' robust shit!

LIKE YOUR MOTHER SAID YOU THE STAIRS IN THIRD GRADE"

fighting giant robots with a samurai sword to be interesting 'enough'? The game is absolutely free of tact, which is not a crime in and of itself; near the end, however, after the six-trillionth out-of-nowhere giant robot has exploded, your Texas-cowboy-partner intones, "These guys are… different from us."

I heard this and groaned so hard I almost died. That was the straw that broke my horse Larry's back. I'd been thinking, "As long as nobody mentions the giant robots outright or even tangentially, the game's anachronistic anime charm is intact." Well, so much for that.

After the deepest of its revelations, I, entranced, went on to beat the game, and finished with enough spite to spoil its ending for all my readers: the good guys win, loves blooms, and the Texas cowboy becomes president. I'm not kidding.

Kind regards



I'M NOT AN ANIME OTAKU

I played a hell of a lot of games this year. I just got *Ace Combat 5* and *The Nightmare Before Christmas* today, without asking for them. *Virtua Fighter: Cyber Generation* arrived two days ago. Next week, from a source in the States (codename: My Brother Clint), I'll receive *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. Soon after, a Microsoft Japan acquaintance will take me to an official pre-release *Halo 2* LAN party. Just two weeks ago, I played *Metal Gear Solid 3* to its finish. My opinion of it will take six weeks to settle in. Heh.

But before the big games arrive, I want to shed some light on *Sword Of The Berserk* for PS2, which is easily the most exciting thing I've played all year. It's a melee fighter and, like *Sakura Taisen V: Episode 0*, it appeals to anime/manga fans. This game, however, is done correctly. Its engine takes into account the weight of the hero's sword, and the cut-scenes are fully 3D-animated, not mere paintings with moving lips. Oh, and play *Ghost In The Shell: Stand-Alone Complex*. It's like *Halo* meets *Bangai-O* meets *Metal Gear Solid*. And not just because Akio Otsuka does the voices of both Solid Snake and Batou.

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Mario Tennis	Nintendo	GC
2	Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War	Sony	PS2
3	Armored Core: Nine Breaker	From Software	PS2
4	Mawaru Made In Wario	Nintendo	GBA
5	Stella Deus	Atlus	PS2
6	Waga Ryu wo Miyo	SCEJ	PS2
7	Rakusho! Pachinko Slot Sengen 2	Tecmo	PS2
8	The King Of Fighters 2003	SNK Playmore	PS2
9	Pokémon Emerald	Nintendo	GBA
10	True Crime: Streets Of LA	Capcom	PS2

(Week ending 24/10/04)


Mario Tennis
Ace Combat 5

"DEATH IS AN ARCADE CONCEPT, INCURRED TO KEEP YOU PUTTING MONEY IN. IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH NARRATIVE, SO IT'S NOT A MECHANIC WE'RE IMPOSING ON YOU"

AMERICAN MCGEE

AMERICAN MCGEE

TMEIC

Before you ask, American McGee really is called American. Clearly, when you're promoting a game and your name is part of its title, it pays to have a distinctive moniker, but this isn't a marketing ploy. McGee's mother knew of a girl called America and thought it was a pretty name, and so American became, well, American. Most gamers will associate the unusual name with *American McGee's Alice*, a twisted take on Lewis Carroll's *Alice In Wonderland* and *Through The Looking Glass* that became a cult success on the PC when it was released in 2000. Though the game was published by Electronic Arts, *Alice* was McGee's project and established him as something of a gaming auteur.

McGee's new title, *Scrapland*, boasts an 'American McGee Presents' tag to advertise its credentials, although McGee insists that wasn't deliberate. "It happened by accident when we were making *Alice* and I fought against it tooth and nail," he says, "but later they went ahead and did it anyway. Of course, later it made no sense to dump a brand EA had spent good money building." EA's insistence on using McGee's name on his first game may seem unusual, but apparently there's a good reason why we don't see *Shigeru Miyamoto's Mario Kart* or *Hideo Kojima's Metal Gear Solid*. "Publishers want to build their brand," explains McGee. "They want you to think 'EA Games' or 'Activision'. They don't want you to think 'that guy' because that guy could be working for someone else tomorrow."

As it happens, 'that guy' is now working for himself, having founded TMEIC (The Mauretania Export Import Company) a few years ago. TMEIC is a videogame, film and television production company, and it's one of the publishers of *Scrapland*, an action-adventure sci-fi title that's soon to arrive on PC and Xbox. "This was a complete project brought to us by Mercury Steam [a small Spanish developer] and I liked it so much I decided to front it in a publicity and marketing capacity, which has already got it more publicity than it might have on its own merit," McGee explains, realising the significance of his name's 'brand'. But his role extends beyond that of a typical publisher – he also contributed to the game's story and dialogue. Still, he's used to turning his hand to all aspects of game production. During the Nineties he spent four years at id where he worked on various *Doom* and *Quake* titles in a variety of roles (design, programming, music management, sound design… you name it). In 1998 he moved to EA where he consulted on titles like *The Sims* before developing *Alice* and becoming creative director of the company's Redwood Studio.

It's clear that McGee's favoured platform is the PC, though he's concerned that it's losing out to consoles. "The PC is a wonderful platform – it allows young developers to make money and consumers to try new and interesting genres they wouldn't see on the consoles," he says. "However, it's becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy that people aren't buying PC games so stores aren't giving them shelf space. It's a problem only consumers can do something about."

He also believes developers have to maintain the status of the PC as a gaming platform, and in *Scrapland* there are various elements that distinguish it from console or arcade fare – you can 't die, for instance. "Death is an arcade concept, incurred to keep you putting money in," explains McGee. "It has nothing to do with narrative, so it's not a mechanic we're imposing on you." The PC's capabilities are also making it easier for *Scrapland* to expand into other media. "At the moment we're going after TV, perhaps even a feature film," says McGee. "When you look at the screen you could be watching a Pixar movie. It won't be hard to sell from a visual aspect."

McGee's next game – *American McGee's Oz*, a PC title based on the *Wizard Of Oz* books – seems to be on hold, but deals have already been struck to develop *Oz* books, toys and films. The fact so much has been licensed from a game that doesn't exist yet suggests that the American McGee brand has established itself as a name to be respected. And remember, it is a real name.



TIGER WOODS? JOHN MADDEN? TONY HAWK? PAH! THEY JUST PUT THEIR NAME ON THE BOX OF TOP-SELLING GAMES. AMERICAN MCGEE, ON THE OTHER HAND, ACTUALLY MAKES TOP-SELLING GAMES BEFORE PUTTING HIS NAME ON THE PACKAGING. AND THOSE GAMES AREN'T BAD, EITHER…

COMMUNITY

EVERY ISSUE, **games™** VISITS A DIFFERENT DEVELOPER. THIS MONTH WE HEAD TO BORDEAUX TO HANG OUT WITH ASOBO

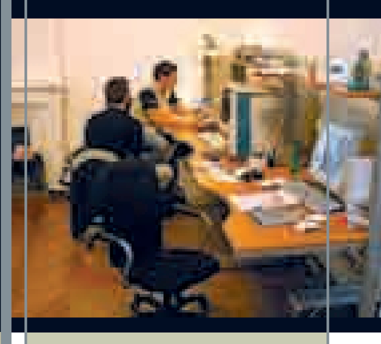
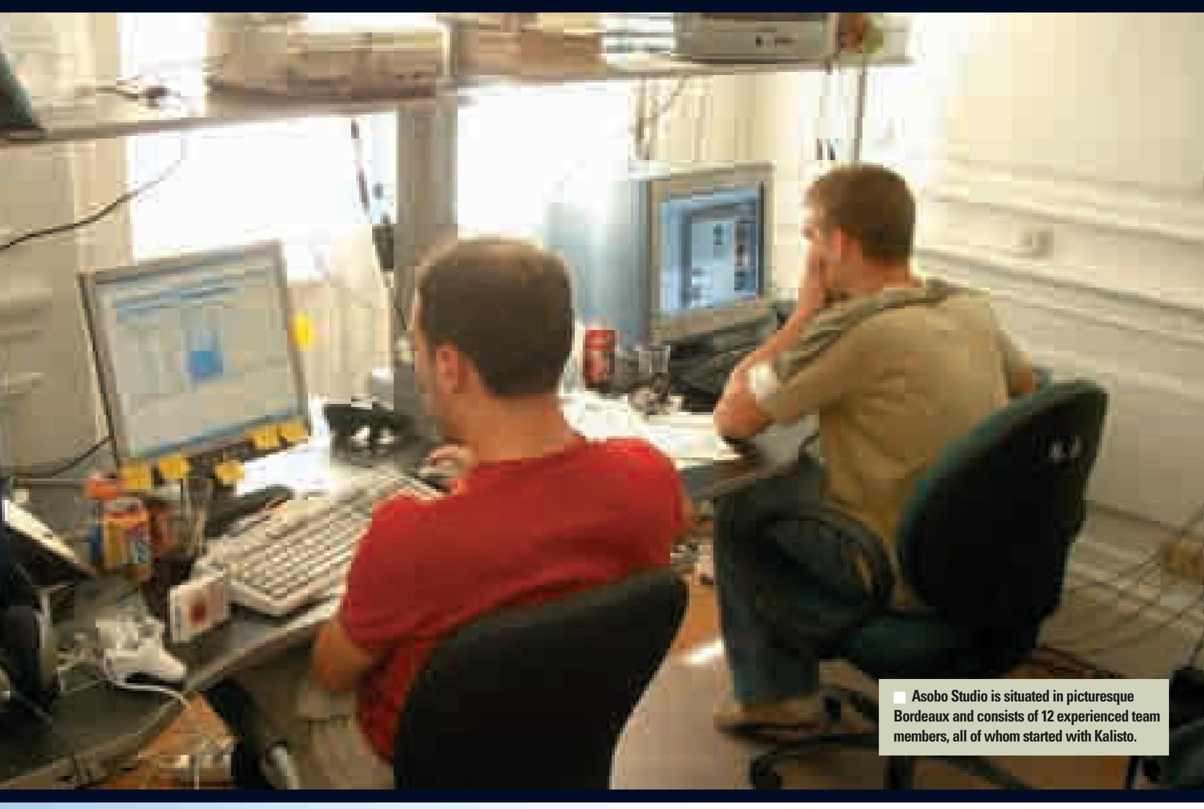
A COMPANY THAT ROSE LIKE A PHOENIX FROM THE ASHES OF KALISTO, ASOBO COULD BE ABOUT TO MAKE ITS MARK. GAMES™ GOES TO FRANCE TO FIND OUT MORE

ASOBO STUDIO

For those who have never been to Bordeaux, there are a few things you should know. It's a picturesque place that's as much about its historic background as it is the nightlife. You can't walk down a street without spying a famous church or theatre, and the locals seem more than happy to fill you in on a bit of local history should you gaze at something for a little too long. The sun always seems to be shining, the preferred mode of transport seems to be bicycle or moped, and it's an annoyingly long train ride from the hustle and bustle of Paris, the place you'd probably expect to find a talented team of game developers.

At the moment Asobo is best known for the fact that it's the company currently working on the fourth instalment in the *CT Special Forces* series, a collection of games that has enjoyed success on many platforms over the last two years, including the PSone



Asobo Studio is situated in picturesque Bordeaux and consists of 12 experienced team members, all of whom started with Kalisto.

"IT WAS THE TEAM SPIRIT THAT WE HAVE THAT LEFT US WITH NO OTHER OPTION OTHER THAN TO CONTINUE WITH OUR WORK"

SEBASTIAN WLOCH, ASOBO STUDIO

and – more recently – the GBA. It's the unveiling of this title that has dragged us away from admiring the local architecture, and rather than frolicking in the sunshine as we perhaps should be, we are being walked through a few areas of the game by its developers in a darkened room – strangely enough, we're not complaining.

Of course, as if game development wasn't tough enough, rather than opting to stick with the side-scrolling action seen in the previous titles, the latest game is having the extra dimension added and will hit our PCs, Xboxes and PS2s in glorious 3D. This is an idea that is also being applied to the new *Metal Slug* game, and from what we've seen of that title, dragging a classic 2D shoot-'em-up into 3D is definitely not an easy task, but for the two men who are taking us through the game – developers with a combined 19 years in the industry – it's just another challenge to overcome.

"It is difficult, but not if you know what has to be done," says Sebastian Wloch, Asobo's lead programmer. "There are many aspects that are common between the 3D *CT Special Forces* and the 2D games. There are two key characters in both and many of the different level types from the 2D games, such as the freefalling sections and sniping areas, are all still in there but we've added them into the main game rather than having them as individual missions. You'll now be able to snipe whenever you want and there are many fully 3D freefall areas to complete. Although these things stay the same, things have to change if you're going to create a successful 3D game from a 2D title."

"One big difference is the render style," adds game designer David Dedeine. "*Fire For Effect* isn't presented in a cartoon manner like the previous 2D games. Where as *CT Special Forces* was very much cartoon action, here the graphical style is more realistic. All animations are on a realistic base, all weapons and equipment are possible and – in many cases – are already in existence. The characters have been totally redesigned and the gameplay has been completely overhauled to fit the new 3D environment. Even though we've



CT Special Forces is Asobo's best chance to make people take notice and really put the studio on the map.

NEVER SAY DIE

Haven't heard of Asobo Studio? Then this is what you've been missing…

SUPER FARM (PS2, 2003)

This was the title that Asobo was created to complete. Based on agricultural combat, where livestock attacked you on sight and would destroy you if you didn't finish them off first, it didn't sell too well but it's not without its fans.



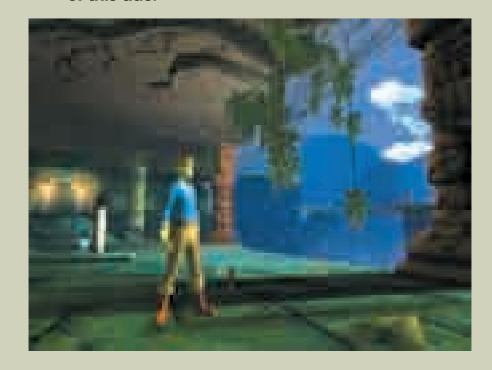
SITTING DUCKS (MULTI, 2003)

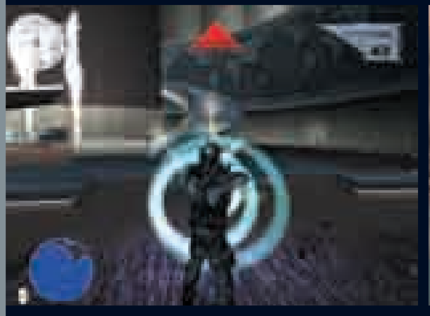
More cartoon antics as you took control of scooter-riding duck, Bill. A simple game that played upon our obvious love of ducks but was a little too kiddie for many gamers (though watching Aldo the alligator squeeze into your scooter's sidecar was hilarious).

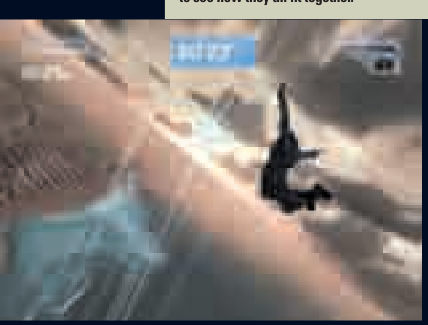


THE MUMMY (MULTI, TBC)

A title that seems to be taking its time emerging. Based on the animated series rather than the blockbuster movie, you'll take control of Alex (the young boy in the film) as he travels around the world fighting evil. Apart from a small selection of screenshots, very little has been seen of this title.







Fire For Effect will incorporate many different styles of play – it will be interesting to see how they all fit together.

MEET THE ASOBO BOYS

1 SEBASTIAN WLOCH
IN A NUTSHELL: Lead programmer who was with Kalisto for ten years before it became Asobo.
FAVOURITE GAMES: *Zelda: The Wind Waker, Doom II, Command & Conquer, Star Fox*

2 DAVID DEDEINE
IN A NUTSHELL: Game designer who has worked on every Kalisto and Asobo title to date.
FAVOURITE GAMES: *WipEout 2097, PES, Quake Arena, Ico*



kept many of the original ideas, things are done very differently and we've been inspired by many other 3D titles along the way." Although Asobo takes inspiration from other titles, the technology behind its games is unique. The studio has always used a nameless proprietary technology that was conceived, developed and tested by the team – but why is the technology so important to the developers? Smiles spread across Wloch and Dedeine's faces. "Our technology allows us to build games on all platforms and it's extremely efficient," explains Wloch. "This means we can programme extremely fast and spend a good percentage of the time playtesting and improving things. It also has all the features that you'd expect any PC technology to have like dynamics, rag-doll, a fully integrated physics engine, lighting and shadowing and a very advanced AI with enemies that have both individual and group behaviours. With our technology we can bring these features from the PC to consoles like the PS2 and Xbox, where they are not seen as often."

> "EVEN THOUGH WE'VE KEPT MANY ORIGINAL IDEAS, THINGS ARE DONE VERY DIFFERENTLY AND WE'VE BEEN INSPIRED BY MANY OTHER 3D TITLES ALONG THE WAY"
> *DAVID DEDEINE, ASOBO*

As a company, Asobo has only been around for a little over two years, but the ties between the team



CHALK AND CHEESE

Something that Asobo really wanted to get right with *CT Special Forces: Fire For Effect* were the differences between the two playable characters. "If you want to stay true to the series, key things can't change," David Dedeine says. "The main thing that we made sure was kept in was the two differently attributed characters. This was to give the game the same varying rhythm that made the 2D titles so great." This means plenty of infiltration and neutralisation with your stealthy character, while you can still deal out absolute carnage with the heavy firepower available to the other. That should keep you on your toes.

go much further back than that. Every one of the dozen studio staff were with Kalisto Entertainment when it went bankrupt back in May 2002 and out of the 300 employees the company had at the time, it was these 12 who refused to let go. They announced their plan to launch a new company, and almost immediately, Asobo Studio was founded and work on Kalisto titles was restarted – only with a fraction of the development team. An inspiring show of commitment, but what was it that drove them to continue when things were looking so bleak? "First of all, we were halfway through *Super Farm* and we really, really liked it," remembers Wloch. "We wanted to actually finish it rather than just give up on it completely. There was a real bond between the team and that game and it just needed to be finished. It was one of the projects that really drew our company together and between that and the team spirit that we have, there seemed to be no other option other than to continue with our work."

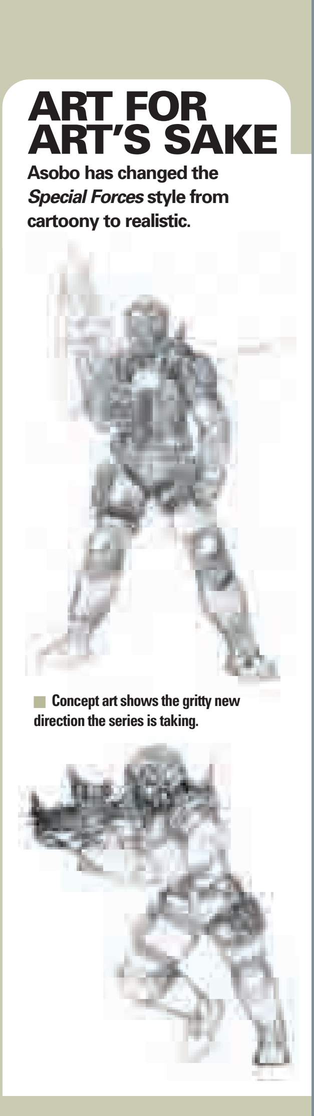
Talking to the team, it's easy to see the bond that they talk about. They almost seem like family, which is unsurprising considering the tumultuous times they have gone through together. Asobo definitely doesn't lack determination and with *Fire For Effect* being released early next year, it's possible that its passion could finally be rewarded. So what can we expect to see from Asobo in the future? A few uncertain glances are fired between them before Wloch responds. "We are going to finish *CT Special Forces* over the next four to six months," he says. Then, suddenly confident again, he adds, "We've been working for a while on some new technology which is targeted towards developing car racing games. This technology will be capable of creating huge environments that will be more than 10,000 square miles in size and will display an astonishing amount of realism. There are also plans to continue working on *Rally Raid*, which we may launch soon after *Fire For Effect*, and we are also hoping for either a sequel to *CT* or at the very least to stay in the same genre. We like developing first-person shooters a lot."

And with that, we're back out into the French sunshine, hoping that Asobo's enthusiasm shines through in all its future games.



ART FOR ART'S SAKE

Asobo has changed the *Special Forces* style from cartoony to realistic.



Concept art shows the gritty new direction the series is taking.

RELEASE LISTS



Metroid Prime 2: Echoes Cube How exactly do you beat a ten out of ten?

Unreal Championship 2 Xbox What has Midway done to *Unreal*? Find out on page 48.

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas PS2 Better late than never, right?

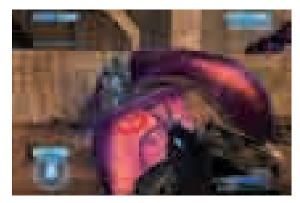
Lego Star Wars Multi An elegant game for a more civilised age – 3+.



HALO 2

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft

Between *Halo 2*'s lengthy single-player campaign and its wealth of online options, juggling FPS action and sleep has become far more difficult. The latter stages of Heroic mode have produced headaches around the office, and with Legendary looming we envisage a lot of Live gaming by way of stress relief.



GTA: SAN ANDREAS

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Rockstar

There are very few games out there that hold attention just as well after completion as prior to it but we've found the mammoth new *GTA* does just that. Big pimping to the left, tearing down Mount Chilead on mountain bikes to the right – Rockstar really has provided us with the gift that keeps on giving.

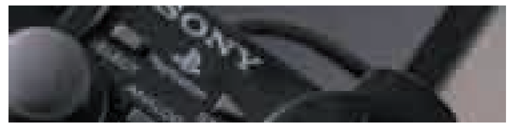


DEAD OR ALIVE ULTIMATE

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft

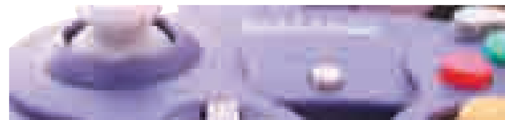
It'll be a few months before we see PAL code that we can play online but to get a feel for the game early, our import copy has seen a good few hours of use. With hundreds of unlockables and just enough tweaks to keep it fresh, this should fill the gap that *Mortal Kombat: Deception* failed to occupy with any conviction.





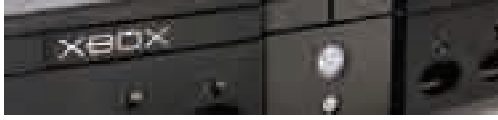
PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
DECEMBER '04			
03 December	Gran Turismo 4	Sony	
03 December	Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within	Ubisoft	Wanted
03 December	GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	EA	
03 December	Call Of Duty: Finest Hour	Activision	
10 December	Fight Club	Vivendi	
10 December	Godzilla: Save The Earth	Atari	
JANUARY '05			
28 January	Blood Will Tell	Sega	
TBC	The Punisher	THQ	
TBC	EyeToy: Chat	Sony	
TBC	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	Rockstar	
TBC	SNK Vs Capcom Chaos	Ignition	
FEBRUARY '05			
04 February	Sonic Mega Collection Plus	Sega	
04 February	Phantom Brave	Koei	
11 February	Neighbours From Hell	JoWood	
11 February	Constantine	SCi	
11 February	Mega Man X8	Capcom	
18 February	Mercenaries	Activision	
25 February	Samurai Warriors: Xtreme Legends	Koei	
TBC	Shadow Of Rome	Capcom	
TBC	Capcom Fighting Jam	Capcom	
TBC	Phantom Crash 2050	Konami	
Q1 '05			
TBC	Ace Combat 5	Sony	
TBC	Destroy All Humans!	THQ	Wanted
TBC	La Pucelle	Koei	
TBC	Devil May Cry 3	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Kessen III	Koei	
TBC	King Of Fighters: Maximum Impact	Ignition	
TBC	Shadow Hearts: Covenant	Midway	
TBC	Everybody's Golf 4	Sony	
TBC	Guilty Gear Isuka	Sega	
TBC	CT Special Forces: Fire For Effect	Hip Interactive	
TBC	Moto GP 4	Sony	
TBC	Killer 7	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	SOCOM 3	Sony	
TBC	Kingdom Hearts 2	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Okami	Capcom	
TBC	Stolen	Hip Interactive	
TBC	Resident Evil Outbreak: File #2	Capcom	
TBC	The Nightmare Before Christmas	Capcom	
TBC	Tak 2: The Staff Of Dreams	THQ	
TBC	Far Cry Instincts	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	Konami	Wanted
TBC	Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Death By Degrees	Sony	
TBC	Sniper Elite	TBC	
TBC	Lego Star Wars	Eidos	
TBC	Nanobreaker	Konami	
TBC	Rumble Roses	Konami	
TBC	Narc	Midway	
TBC	Super Monkey Ball Deluxe	Sega	
TBC	Brothers In Arms	Ubisoft	
TBC	Viewtiful Joe 2	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Neo Contra	Konami	
TBC	Monster Hunter	Capcom	Wanted



GAMECUBE

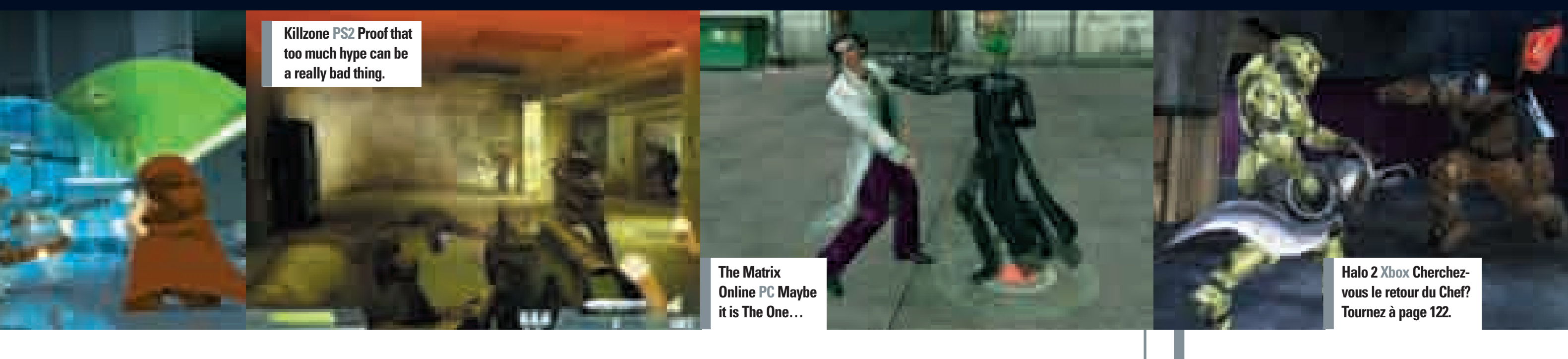
Month	Title	Publisher	
DECEMBER '04			
03 December	Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within	Ubisoft	Wanted
03 December	Call Of Duty: Finest Hour	Activision	
03 December	GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	EA	
JANUARY '05			
07 January	Legend Of Zelda: Four Swords Adventure	Nintendo	Wanted
FEBRUARY '05			
11 February	Neighbours From Hell	JoWood	
TBC	Mario Power Tennis	Nintendo	
Q1 '05			
TBC	Advance Wars: Under Fire	Nintendo	
TBC	Resident Evil 4	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Mario Party 6	Nintendo	
TBC	Tak 2: The Staff Of Dreams	THQ	
TBC	Viewtiful Joe 2	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Donkey Kong: Jungle Beat	Nintendo	
TBC	Nintendo Puzzle Collection	Nintendo	
TBC	Star Fox	Nintendo	
TBC	Odama	Nintendo	
TBC	Scaler	Take 2	
TBC	Area 51	Midway	
TBC	Killer 7	Capcom	Wanted



XBOX

Month	Title	Publisher	
DECEMBER '04			
03 December	GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	EA	
03 December	Call Of Duty: Finest Hour	Activision	
03 December	Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within	Ubisoft	Wanted
03 December	Blinx 2: Masters Of Time And Space	Microsoft	Wanted

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES


Killzone PS2 Proof that too much hype can be a really bad thing.

The Matrix Online PC Maybe it is The One…

Halo 2 Xbox Cherchez-vous le retour du Chef? Tournez à page 122.

10 December	Fight Club	Vivendi	
10 December	Godzilla: Save The Earth	Atari	
JANUARY '05			
28 January	American McGee's Scrapland	Deep Silver	
TBC	The Punisher	THQ	
TBC	MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf	Microsoft	
TBC	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	Rockstar	
TBC	SNK Vs Capcom Chaos	Ignition	
FEBRUARY '05			
11 February	Neighbours From Hell	JoWood	
11 February	Constantine	SCi	
11 February	Knights Of The Old Republic II: The Sith Lords	Activision	Wanted
18 February	Mercenaries	Activision	
22 February	Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict	Midway	
TBC	Forza Motorsport	Microsoft	
TBC	Capcom Fighting Jam	Capcom	
Q1 '05			
TBC	Doom 3	Activision	
TBC	Brothers In Arms	Ubisoft	
TBC	Dead Or Alive Ultimate	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Pariah	Hip Interactive	
TBC	Sniper Elite	TBC	
TBC	Star Wars: Republic Commando	Activision	
TBC	Oddworld: Stranger	EA	Wanted
TBC	Narc	Midway	
TBC	Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	
TBC	Operation Flashpoint	Codemasters	
TBC	Far Cry Instincts	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	CT Special Forces: Fire For Effect	Hip Interactive	
TBC	Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Wanted
TBC	Destroy All Humans!	THQ	Wanted
TBC	Super Monkey Ball Deluxe	Sega	
TBC	Lego Star Wars	Eidos	
TBC	Area 51	Midway	
TBC	Conker: Live And Reloaded	Microsoft	
TBC	Kameo: Elements Of Power	Microsoft	
TBC	Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	Wanted
TBC	Tak 2: The Staff Of Dreams	THQ	
TBC	Jade Empire	Microsoft	Wanted



PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
DECEMBER '04			
03 December	Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within	Ubisoft	Wanted
03 December	Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	Wanted
10 December	Lord Of The Rings: Battle For Middle-earth	EA	
17 December	The Chronicles Of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay	Vivendi	
TBC	Advent Rising	Majesco	
TBC	Tribes: Vengeance	Vivendi	
JANUARY '05			
28 January	American McGee's Scrapland	Deep Silver	
FEBRUARY '05			
11 February	Knights Of The Old Republic II: The Sith Lords	Activision	
TBC	Immortal Cities: Children Of The Nile	Sega	
TBC	Second Sight	Codemasters	
Q1 '05			
TBC	Duke Nukem Forever	Vivendi	
TBC	Bet On Soldier	Digital Jesters	
TBC	The Matrix Online	Warner Bros	Wanted
TBC	Sniper Elite	TBC	
TBC	UFO: Aftershock	Cenega	
TBC	Pariah	Hip Interactive	
TBC	Lego Star Wars	Eidos	
TBC	Black & White 2	EA	Wanted
TBC	Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	
TBC	Battlefield 2	EA	Wanted
TBC	Operation Flashpoint 2	Codemasters	Wanted
TBC	Star Wars: Republic Commando	Activision	
TBC	S.T.A.L.K.E.R.	THQ	Wanted
TBC	Brothers In Arms	Ubisoft	
TBC	CT Special Forces: Fire For Effect	Hip Interactive	

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Month	Title	Publisher	
DECEMBER '04			
03 December	Mario Party Advance	Nintendo	
03 December	Final Fantasy I & II: Dawn Of Souls	Nintendo	
TBC	Banjo Pilot	THQ	
JANUARY '05			
TBC	It's Mr Pants	THQ	
FEBRUARY '05			
TBC	Kingdom Hearts: Chain Of Memories	Buena Vista	Wanted
Q1 '05			
TBC	Boktai 2: Solar Boy Django	Konami	
TBC	Pokémon Emerald	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	F-Zero Climax	Nintendo	
TBC	Metal Slug Advance	Ignition	Wanted
TBC	Donkey Kong: King Of Swing	Nintendo	
TBC	Tak 2: The Staff Of Dreams	THQ	
TBC	Classic NES Series: Dr Mario	Nintendo	
TBC	Classic NES Series: Metroid	Nintendo	
TBC	Classic NES Series: Castlevania	Nintendo	
TBC	Classic NES Series: Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link	Nintendo	

PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. Which is completely beyond our control, so don't go giving us evils.

games™ ON THE HORIZON

RESIDENT EVIL OUTBREAK: FILE #2

Format: PlayStation 2
Publisher: Capcom

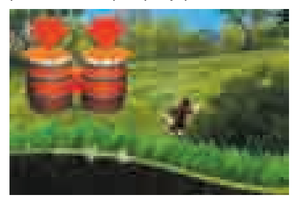
With word that the problems of the first game may have been fixed colliding head-on with the awesome prospect of zombie elephants, we've suddenly become much more interested in Capcom's online survival horror. Surely it can't be screwed up again – can it?



DONKEY KONG: JUNGLE BEAT

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo

As our *Donkey Konga* bongos gather dust, we can't help but scour release lists in the hope that we can soon go all percussive once more. Enter *Jungle Beat*, the most bizarrely controlled adventure since Sonic's trackball mistake, though it promises to be pretty enjoyable.



MONSTER HUNTER

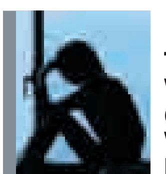
Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Capcom

Since finding that *Killzone* is little more than average online and *Gran Turismo 4* won't even feature network play, there must be something worth playing online for the PS2. If internet rumblings are to be believed, *Monster Hunter* should be just that, offering team-based action for up to four hunters. So please, Capcom, sort your online service out.





THE PEOPLE IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY TELL IT LIKE IT IS…



THE WONDERS OF A WASTEFUL INDUSTRY

Monaco, Los Angeles, Tokyo. Eight pints, ten vodkas and a hotel room. Boots, stockings, pretty face and a press release. Is this type of PR really justified? That depends on whether you think PR are the first two letters of 'properly' or 'precise', or whether they only appear in 'profiteering'.

We've watched a few publishers fall by the wayside in the past five years and you have to look at reasons for their demise. Unfortunately, some of this responsibility has to be levelled at the forecasting of product sales, the marketing and PR spend, and the responsibility that comes with the territory. It seems all too easy to say that every product will sell X thousand units while the jet is waiting to fly the whole industry to some exotic location for 30 minutes of presentation, followed by two days of solid partying.

On the other hand, we're an industry full of young dynamic individuals who make this business tick, so celebrating and networking should be expected… But are we thinking enough? Do we consider the costs involved in making a game, the return on capital employed and how many more units we will sell?

To be frank, no – we don't think about it nearly enough.

So where do we go? Do we keep following the status quo or is it time to buck the trend and show some principles? As an industry, we waste money; too many companies have gone bankrupt because we act and spend without full justification and commercial sensibility.

Every single employee in each organisation needs to look at their role and act responsibly to ensure that we remember the most important factor – supplying what our customers want.

NAME AND POSITION WITHIN THE INDUSTRY WITHHELD, NOT SURPRISINGLY

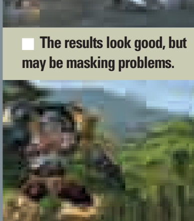
FROM THE FRONT

DESPITE PROMISING RESULTS ATARI MAY STILL BE FLOUNDERING, BUT PS2 PROVES IT RULES THE WORLD

ATARI'S FUTURE COMES INTO QUESTION



The results look good, but may be masking problems.



THERE MAY BE TROUBLE AHEAD

It seems that Atari's future is looking rather shaky, and many of the reactions to the company's second quarter results help to prove this. Market analysts in the US have issued very different responses to Atari's recent financial announcement, which showed that the publisher's revenue fell short of predictions. However, the report did reveal notably smaller losses than were expected.

Positive aspects of the report show that for the three months up to 30 September, Atari reported revenues of $71.4 million – this is an 18 per cent increase on last year's figure but still misses the firm's own projection of $75 million.

Furthermore, losses were smaller than predicted – between July and September the firm was only down $16.9 million, less than the predicted $19.3 million.

However, Atari has lowered its future projections once again and it now expects to see revenues of between $450 million and $470 million rather than its previous projection of $470 million. The 'earnings per share' (EPS) projection remains at $0.20 to $0.25, but some analysts believe this to be a little optimistic, and are expecting EPS to be as low as $0.10 for the 2005 financial year.

These figures may not be disastrous,but they're certainly not promising, and there has been speculation over whether Atari's parent company, Infogrames, may opt to sell Atari to aid with its considerable debts. Speaking at a conference that accompanied the financial announcement, Atari chairman and CEO Bruno Bonnell commented on this situation.

"There is a long list of options that Infogrames can activate before deciding to sell its main asset," he told those who grilled him about the financial status of Atari's parent company, which is being increasingly called into question.

It's widely believed that Atari may have been in serious financial difficulties had *Driv3r* been a flop. For some reason, however, the sub-standard title continues to sell well.



PS2 – now more popular than oxygen and food.

FUN, EVERYONE

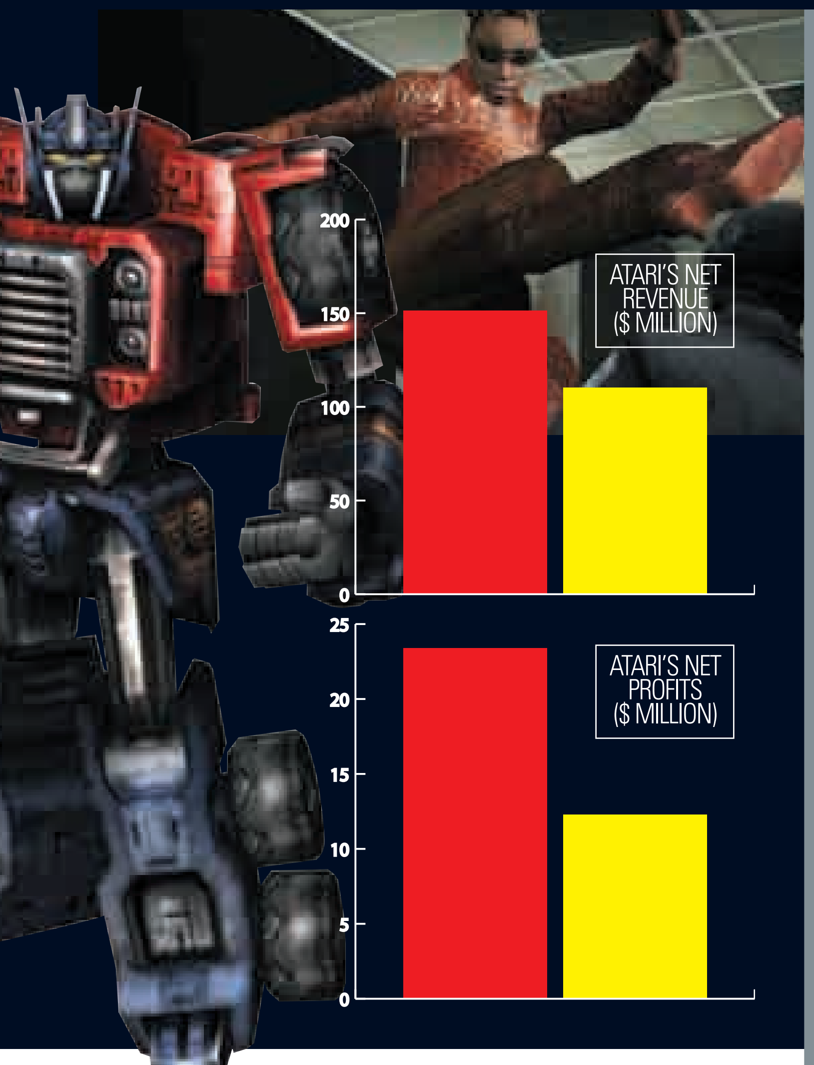
SONY REVEALS ITS PLAYSTATION SALES FIGURES

As if there was ever any doubt about the level of its success, Sony recently revealed the true scale of its global dominance in the console market by releasing the latest figures for both incarnations of the PlayStation.

The figures show that the PS2 has shifted over 74 million units globally, with North America being the greatest consumer of Sony hardware with 32.2 million sales. Europe was next, providing 25.9 million sales and Japan accounted for 17.9 million. The UK sales figure alone is thought to be approaching the 7.5 million mark.

Proving that age is no hindrance when it comes to quality games, the PS2's older brother, the PSone, also continues to sell, with a total of 100.9 million sold since it launched in Japan ten years ago, with sales in North America at 40.2million, 39.8 million in Europe and 20.9 million in Japan.

These sales are unlikely to slow any time soon either. With the remodelled, super-slim PStwo (which was released in the UK in October) already enjoying high sales, Sony could hit the 100 million total in time for the PlayStation3's release in about 16 months' time.



Atari's Net Revenue ($ Million)

April-June 2003: $151.4 million

April-June 2004: $110.3 million

Atari's Net Profits ($ Million)

April-June 2003: $23.4 million

April-June 2004: $12.3 million

DIGITAL ILLUSIONS ANNOUNCES A NEXT-GENERATION TITLE

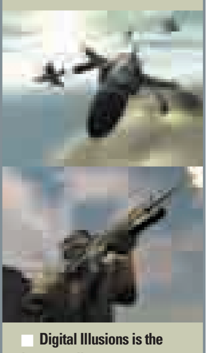
LOOK TO THE FUTURE

Swedish developer Digital Illusions has revealed that it has signed a contract for a next-generation console title, targeted at Xbox 2 and PlayStation3, which will launch in late 2006 or early 2007.

The news was made public when the company announced its financial results for the nine months ended 30 September. The developer also revealed that it has bought out Trauma Studios, which confirms rumours that the studio is working on a new PC title based on the *Battlefield 2* engine.

The *Battlefield* titles have now sold over 4.4 million units in total, which would help explain Digital Illusions' promising financial results. The company saw a 23 per cent jump in revenues – net revenue came to 172.8 million kronor (€19 million), with pre-tax profit of 41.6 million kronor (€4.6 million).

Although the name *Battlefield* wasn't mentioned in connection with the next-generation title, it's a possibility that this is the game that Trauma Studios will be working on. We'll be finding out more about *Battlefield 2* in the next issue when we visit Digital Illusions, so we may be able to find out exactly which platforms it will appear on.



Digital Illusions is the latest studio to go next-gen.



UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar	PS2
2	FIFA 2005	EA Sports	Multi
3	Football Manager 2005	Sega	PC
4	Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	PS2
5	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005	EA Sports	Multi
6	Burnout 3: Takedown	EA Games	Multi
7	Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	Multi
8	Shark Tale	Activision	Multi
9	The Sims 2	EA Games	PC
10	Lord Of The Rings: The Third Age	EA Games	Multi

San Andreas? At the top of the chart? We never saw that one coming. In other less predictable news, Sega is no doubt jumping for joy at the success of Sports Interactive's latest title, while the usual mix of EA titles make up the rest of the chart.

All information is compiled by ChartTrack and is the strict copyright of Elspa (UK) Ltd. UK Entertainment Software Sales Charts (Full Price, All Formats) (w/e 6 November 2004)



GTA: SAN ANDREAS

FIFA 2005

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005





Come quietly or there will be… trouble **Robocop Arcade [Data East] 1988**



TURN ON, JACK IN, TUNE OUT

THE MATRIX ONLINE

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: Monolith Productions
RELEASE: 18 Jan '05
GENRE: MMORPG
PLAYERS: Massively Multiplayer

HISTORY

■ Monolith's project is an MMORPG based on *The Matrix*, which is itself a twisted take on the concept of MMORPGs. No red pill required, luckily.

CONCEPT

■ The *Matrix* licence has only spawned one game so far – Atari's disappointing *Enter The Matrix*. More games are said to be on the way, although Monolith's may well best them.

The One is dead, long live the One. The conclusion of the movie trilogy and subsequent disenchantment of many *Matrix* fans hasn't sounded the death knell for the Wachowski brothers' franchise, but signified a new beginning from which many are hoping The Matrix can be reborn. The slate is wiped clean, giving Monolith Productions the ideal opportunity to rebuild the world of The Matrix from the ground up. Albeit with a lot of help from the franchise's creators.

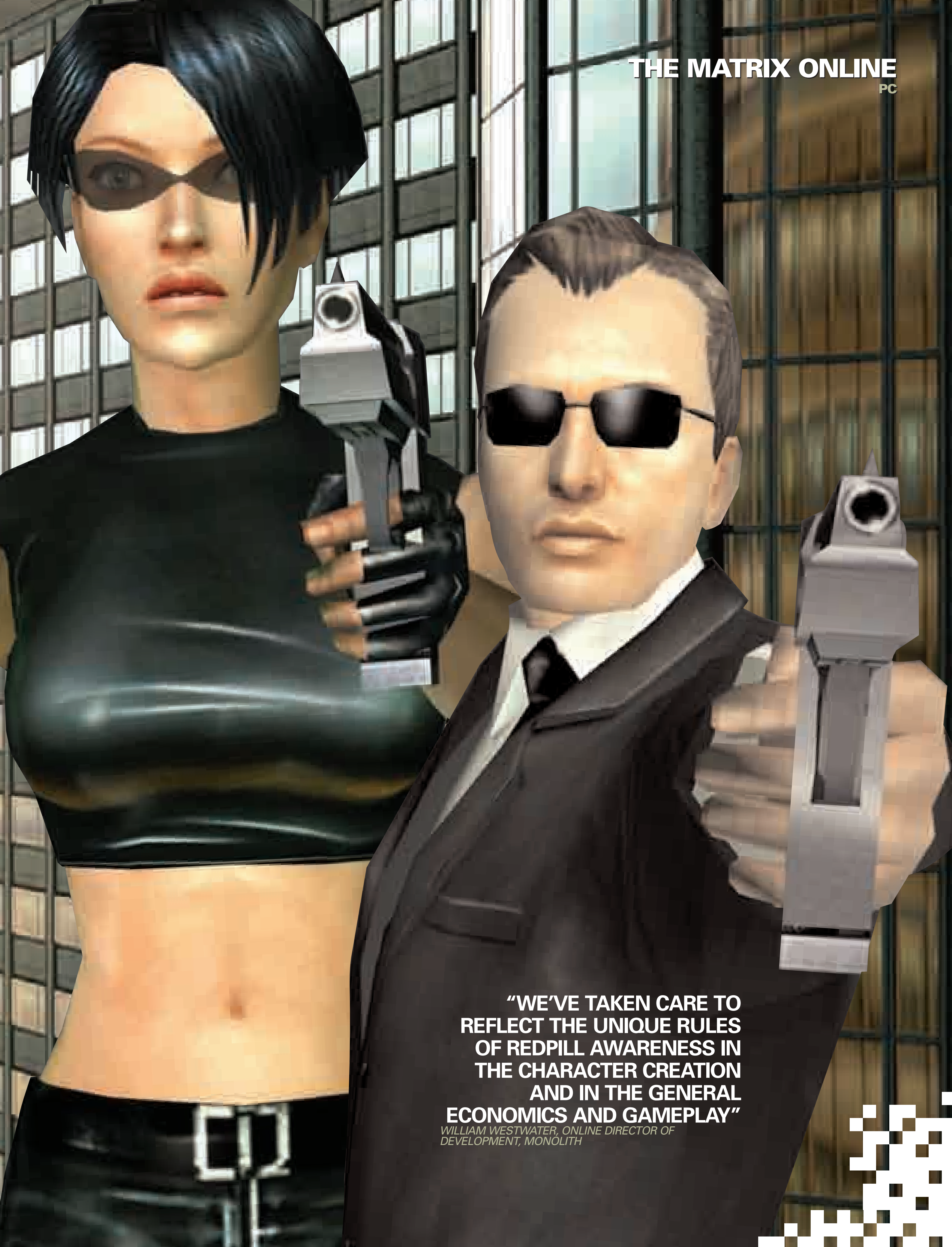
"*The Matrix Online* is essentially the Wachowski brothers' brainchild," admits Toby Ragaini, lead designer on *The Matrix Online* (known as *MxO*) and massively multiplayer creative director at Monolith. "From our earliest conversations, they expressed their desire for *Matrix* fans to be able to participate in the continuing saga that unfolds in *MxO*, and Monolith was more than happy to help turn that vision into reality. With the help of Paul Chadwick [author and illustrator of comic book *Concrete*], the brothers have created a high-level, year-long outline that ties together activities that the players will be performing alongside dramatic interactions with characters like Morpheus and the Oracle."

With the Wachowskis so involved in the project, it's no surprise that *MxO*'s plot plays a fairly hefty role in the gameplay – although players have plenty of freedom when it comes to their actions, there are numerous guiding forces. Picking up where *The Matrix Revolutions* left off, the world of the Matrix is evolving. Neo's sacrifice has created an uneasy truce between the humans of Zion and the Machines, but such peace can't last forever and already the three powers grappling for control are cracking under the pressure.

Exiled programs move freely looking for sanctuary, allowing the power-hungry Merovingian to spread his influence to ensure that the Matrix survives. The Machines, facing an increasing number of people choosing to trade the safety of the Matrix for life in the world of the real, believe too many revivals (or Redpills, as they're known) could bring the Matrix to its knees. Even the people of Zion are at breaking point, with the influx of Redpills creating divisions between those who want peace and those who feel the time has to come to finally overthrow the Machines. And it's into the middle of this

STAND AND FIGHT

One thing that Monolith has been keen to implement is the concept of player versus player combat – as such, *MxO* has not one but three different styles to choose from. Duelling allows characters of the same allegiance to fight head-to-head in a gentlemanly fashion over matters of honour, while Team Duelling is more of the same between groups of up to eight players. However, it's within the Archive that much of the fighting will take place – a huge PvP arena that requires effort on the part of the player to access, but can yield great rewards for those who manage to escape in one piece.



"WE'VE TAKEN CARE TO REFLECT THE UNIQUE RULES OF REDPILL AWARENESS IN THE CHARACTER CREATION AND IN THE GENERAL ECONOMICS AND GAMEPLAY"

WILLIAM WESTWATER, ONLINE DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT, MONOLITH

furore that you, as a newly recruited Redpill, are tossed headlong, with your actions ultimately proving decisive to the Matrix's future.

A touch melodramatic? Perhaps, but then the *Matrix* has always shown a penchant for the theatrical. However, while the Wachowskis have the final say on everything to do with the game ("For one thing, they were very clear the players should not fly like Neo," says Ragaini), much of the creative direction has been left to Monolith; a massive plus point, considering the company's reputation for quality. While some might see a considerable gulf between the developer's previous understanding of developing FPS games and creating an entire sustainable world, though, Monolith has grasped the challenge of trying something new with both hands; in fact, the world currently on display in the *MxO* beta test is far from what you'd expect from a developer with no previous experience with the genre.

Put simply, the world of *MxO* is gigantic. Set out as a sprawling mega-city consisting of four major districts, each of which is split into neighbourhoods, things will feel vaguely familiar to those who've played *City Of Heroes*, even though *MxO*'s lack of garish colour gives things a grittier. more realistic feel. The atmosphere changes depending on which part of the city you're in – the Downtown district, for instance, with its mirrored skyscrapers and bustle of people, is no less intimidating than the rundown squalor of the Slums or the Asian quarter of the International district, but for different reasons. As we said, though, it's the sheer scale of the world that's the most impressive element.

Whereas *City Of Heroes* allowed players to roam free in the overworld but restricted access to interior locations unless on a mission, *MxO* lets you go anywhere you please at any time and explore almost every inch of the world laid out before you. "Each district is between one and four million square metres," says Ragaini, "although this doesn't take into account all the vertical space either. Because it's a city, almost every building

THREE SIDES TO EVERY REDPILL

Split into three very distinct branches, *MxO*'s Ability Tree lets players keep track of how their skills are progressing and see what they can aspire to. Although you can mix and match between the branches thanks to the game's advanced customisation, focusing on one particular style can drastically change your approach to the world of the Matrix.

THE SOLDIER

The most combat-based branch of the tree, Soldiers can learn four martial arts as well as how to use firearms. Special skills then branch off these, such as the ability to perform a cartwheel while shooting at an opponent.

THE HACKER

A Hacker uses Programs as weapons rather than guns. Split into two groups – Viruses and Upgrades – a Hacker's skills let them manipulate the code of the Matrix in order to damage their opponent or increase their own skills for a limited time.

THE SPY

A stealthy alternative to the Soldier, Spies can blend into the background to sneak past guards, disable alarms or crack security. They also have increased agility, can take on the form of NPCs to evade detection, and use a number of silent attacks.



Hackers can enhance their fighting abilities by using programs to alter the code of the Matrix.

DESIGNER PROFILE

■ Knowing that it needed expert knowledge in order to create a successful MMORPG, Monolith brought in Toby Ragaini – a designer with over eight years of experience in the genre – to take on the role of lead designer and massively multiplayer creative director. Ragaini also has a BA in molecular biology.

HISTORY

■ **ASHERON'S CALL** 1999 [PC]



■ Fights happen everywhere, from alleyways to rain-drenched rooftops.

"IT'S TRUE THAT OTHER COMPANIES WANTED TO MAKE A MATRIX MMORPG, BUT I GUESS THE WACHOWSKIS JUST LIKED OUR DESIGN"

TOBY RAGAINI, LEAD DESIGNER, MONOLITH

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF THE REAL

THE MATRIX x LOTS OF PEOPLE - KEANU REEVES = MATRIX ONLINE



has multiple floors; if you added up all the floor space in the game, it would be a simply staggering figure."

Of course, having to shape the gameplay around the Wachowskis' storyline has left Monolith working hard to ensure that complete freedom of movement isn't the only choice that players have. There's also the small matter of your character's allegiance as they progress through the game. All players begin as Redpills freed by Zion, but their loyalties don't have to lie with the human faction; having three organisations vying for your attention gives you the option to cast aside Zion and become a Machine or Merovingian operative instead.

Contacts made around the city may lead you in a new direction, as every mission completed for a particular organisation increases a player's reputation in its eyes, although juggling missions for multiple sides will make it hard for any one side to trust you. The only way to access the more advanced missions is to dedicate your efforts entirely to one of the three organisations; in the case of Zion, for instance, earning a high enough reputation will allow you to become a hovercraft captain in the 'real world', effectively giving you the power to lead your own crew within the Matrix. However, choosing an allegiance isn't straightforward. While players may want to side with the power

"WE FELT THAT IT WAS IMPERATIVE TO PRESERVE CHARACTER CONTINUITY BETWEEN THIS GAME AND THE FILMS AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE"

JASON HALL, SENIOR VP, WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT

The environments in *MxO* are incredibly gritty and realistic compared to other MMORPGs.

MOVIE PROFILE

■ What is *The Matrix*? A trilogy of films that both managed to entrance and disappoint so many people. While the first movie was deserving of its success, the sequels faltered. Many accused its creators of trying to be too clever and ruining the series as quickly as it took off.

HISTORY

- THE MATRIX REVOLUTIONS [2003]
- THE MATRIX RELOADED [2003]
- THE MATRIX [1999]



■ Tailoring the look of your character is just one of the key concepts in *MxO*.

that suits their moral standing, the lines between right and wrong are a little blurry. "We've been very careful not to paint one side as 'good' and the other as 'evil'," insists Ragaini. "If you're familiar with the Animatrix film *Second Renaissance*, it's clear that the brothers don't necessarily envision the Machines as the bad guys. To communicate this, we make sure each side has logical and consistent agendas."

But if good and evil are in flux within *MxO*, the purity of combat remains a constant. Obviously, Monolith was bound to have problems replicating the action of the *Matrix* movies, both the martial arts and the gun play. Thankfully, the developer has melded two methods together to give players a choice when engaging an enemy. The first system, branded Free-Fire, allows you to attack a target using long-range weaponry – handy if your character is low on health or has particular skill using guns, even if it's not that exciting to watch. But if you fancy a more authentic Matrix experience, then there's the option for close-quarter fighting using Monolith's unique Interlock system. Interlocking essentially locks two characters together and allows you to pick different tactics that affect how the fight progresses; the range of tactics starts off small but soon expands into four main categories (Fast Attack, Power Attack, Grab and Block) along with additional skills depending on your character's abilities, whether you're carrying a gun or not, and so on.

It might sound like the Matrix equivalent of 'paper, scissors, stone', but while the interaction is incredibly simple – you just click on the icon for the tactic you'd like to use and then see how it compares to your opponent's response – the way those actions translate into animations is rather impressive. Characters cartwheel away to dodge gunfire, jump in with an array of kicks and punches, block flurries of kung fu strikes and even move in slow-motion depending on the choices made. "Like the movies, bullet-time kicks in during dramatic moments in a fight scene," says Ragaini. "Just like in the movies, bullet-time is used as a visual signifier that something really cool just happened."

Thankfully, Monolith is doing more than just relying on the 'cool' factor of *The Matrix* to draw in the crowds, and while we don't doubt we'll see dozens of Neo clones hyper-jumping their way around *MxO*, the aim for Monolith is to create a quality MMORPG first and a game based on *The Matrix* second. "We understand that you can't simply slap a great licence on a lousy MMO," admits Ragaini, "so we identified opportunities to improve the core MMORPG gameplay experience with *MxO*." Among these improvements are the way the game accommodates gamers who can't play for long periods at a time, letting them experience as much of the story as a full-time player; and the introduction of 'character regret', which means you can reconfigure your character's abilities every time you play, rather than having to stick to the decisions you made at the beginning of the game.

And those aren't the only parts of the MMORPG genre that Monolith has tried to improve, as Ragaini explains: "I could talk all day about crafting code, exploring the world for data nodes, the intricacies of the faction social system, and the risk-reward structure of combat, but I've got a game to finish…"

WRITE TO REPLY

Although completing missions will earn your character experience, it's possible to advance your character's abilities in other ways too – specifically, the skill of writing your own 'code'. Code can be used to generate virtually every item in the game, from clothing and restorative items to all manner of weaponry. However, becoming an expert at code writing takes effort on the part of the player, although it's not quite as complex as it sounds. "To write code, players will need to get access to the proper abilities, equipment, code structures and code fragments," says Toby Ragaini. "If you don't have the code structure for an item you are attempting to build, you can try to decompile a copy of the item and extract the structure that way. Once you have learned the code structure, you combine the specified code fragments using a special code writing panel – if your ability check succeeds you are able to generate the code."

UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP 2: THE LIANDRI CONFLICT

SO UNLIKE UNREAL IT'S UNREAL… OR SOMETHING

Everyone knows *Unreal*. We know it very well, or at least we thought we did. In what some would call a 'brave' move, Epic Games has transformed *Unreal* to such a degree that even its own mother wouldn't recognise it. *Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict* may as well be called something else – it's really not much like the *Unreal* games of old.

The major change comes in the form of the precarious implementation of a third-person perspective and melee combat – two elements entirely reliant on each other and essential to the game. While players still have the option to run around in first-person, shooting at anyone who crosses their path, melee is no subtle introduction. It forces a third-person view upon players and, from what we've played, works as an instrumental part of the game and is key to success. Epic told us it's possible to be just as successful if you only use guns, but from our time with the title the fact is that if you want to win, spending the majority of your time in the third-person melee viewpoint is practically compulsory.

But this isn't just a simple alternative camera view – Melee mode brings a multitude of new moves and tactics. Combat regularly involves a process of close-quarter fighting (something you'd never imagine being useful in an *Unreal* title) and special manoeuvres that will be available to you depending on your level of Adrenaline. Melee weapons are character specific, fitting in with their owner's appearance and personality, ranging from claws to swords and staff-based weapons. A lock-on system also increases accuracy.

One of the more noteworthy combat additions in Melee mode is the nifty way in which you can repel an opponent's gunfire with a single button press. This is very simple and requires no aiming on the part of the returning player – as the rocket or Bio Glob approaches you simply knock it back baseball style and it returns on target. While this is undoubtedly a handy skill for those who wish to become melee masters, it's yet another factor that penalises those who want to play the game as they've been used to playing *Unreal* titles since the series' birth. We can see how traditionalists will become increasingly frustrated with this. Hopefully by the time the game makes it onto the shelves, this anti-balance will be tweaked.

The Liandri Conflict changes the Adrenaline system from the previous games, making it a much more vital pick-up than before – and not just a pick-up, as your Adrenaline Meter now regenerates (slowly) over time. Each character has special abilities that can be activated with Adrenaline in the player's possession – abilities such as Nimble, which turns characters into floating, wall-bouncing monkey-demons capable of jumps and all-round dexterity way beyond their natural capabilities. Multiplayer modes such as Capture The Flag change tactically when you have the option to use special abilities in order to rush back to your base.

While many Adrenaline attacks are commonly shared, a few are unique to certain characters. Lauren, for example, has Adrenaline abilities capable of sucking life from other players, regenerating her own in the process. This is essential for Lauren, though, as she is markedly weaker in ▷

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Midway
DEVELOPER: Epic Games
RELEASE: Feb '05
GENRE: Action Shooter
PLAYERS: 1-8 (online)

CONCEPT

Unreal goes third-person and introduces melee combat into a previously guns-only environment. Fans become scared.

"AS ITS OWN NEW BREED OF GAME THIS WOULD PROBABLY GO DOWN QUITE WELL – BUT IT'S JUST NOT UNREAL"

TABLE FOR ONE, PLEASE

Even though *The Liandri Conflict* is primarily intended for online play, the single-player mode isn't going to be some last-minute addition – Epic Games has told us it intends to do a little more than simply replicate the online modes with bots. Deathmatch variations will almost certainly be the way in which the single-player game is played out, but Epic intends to add a story to the arena matches that goes deeper into the personalities of the characters than most arena-based shooting games. As well as their own story, each character has a 'Tournament Ladder' that governs their path through the game and the weapons they get to use, ensuring there's diversity and longevity for lonesome, broadband-lacking *Unreal* fans.



In situations like this, the lighter, weaker female characters are almost sure to come off worse.

UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP 2: THE LIANDRI CONFLICT

XBOX



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Founded in 1991 in Rockville, Maryland, Epic Games started developing the original *Unreal* in 1996 when the company signed to publisher GT Interactive. After establishing *Unreal* and *Unreal Tournament* as true FPS contenders and releasing much-demanded sequels, Epic Games now has its titles published by Midway.

HISTORY

- **UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003** 2002 [PC]
- **UNREAL** 1998 [PC]
- **EXTREME PINBALL** 1996 [Multi]

"THE GAME FEATURES A DEEP MELEE COMBAT SYSTEM THAT SEAMLESSLY BLENDS IN WITH THE RANGED WEAPON COMBAT"

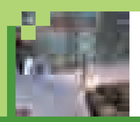
MIDWAY PRESS RELEASE

■ First-person mode hasn't disappeared, but third-person is vital to succeed.

UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP 2: THE LIANDRI CONFLICT [CONT]



The big guns are still here, but the way they're used is pretty different.



FRANCHISE PROFILE

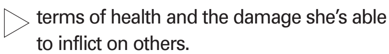
Released in 1998, *Unreal* saw the franchise start life as a primarily single-player experience. Then came *Unreal Tournament*, an arena-based multiplayer-centric game created to compete with arena-FPS daddy *Quake*. After numerous sequels, the series is going third-person with *Unreal Championship 2*.

HISTORY

- **UNREAL II** 2003 [PC]
- **UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP** 2002 [Xbox]
- **UNREAL TOURNAMENT** 1999 [PC]







terms of health and the damage she's able to inflict on others.

Characters are based on three types: light, medium and heavy. Lauren is light (in case you couldn't guess) so it's not wise to go toe-to-toe with a bigger character. On the other hand, the bigger, stronger and invariably uglier characters don't need to worry about special abilities too much as they're able to charge at enemies fists flailing and find success that way.

So it's all change with *Unreal*. No longer is it simply a case of running around an arena trying to out-shoot and out-bunny-hop rival players while confined to a first-person viewpoint. It's now a case of running, jumping, floating and bouncing off walls while using long-range, melee and special attacks. The game has been rebuilt from the ground up to make the most of the Xbox hardware. *Unreal Championship*, while an Xbox title, was a variation of *Unreal Tournament 2003* on PC and didn't make the most of the Xbox's unique charms. So for *The Liandri Conflict* everything bar the original engine has been changed.

And it does look stunning, if slightly tinged with the Midway-esque luminescence that seems to cloak the *Mortal Kombat* games. While Epic Games maintains the game looked and played pretty much the way it does now before Midway took on publishing duties, it's hard to ignore the similarities. *Mortal Kombat*-style finishing moves have been thrown in, with players having to enter button combinations once they've frozen an enemy in order to perform a 'humiliation' move. There's also a *Mortal Kombat* character hidden away. Epic Games wouldn't tell us which character this is, as apparently it's yet to be decided, but it did tell us it would be an 'old-school' *Kombat* veteran. Fiddling around in the character select menu revealed Sub Zero/Scorpion and Raiden-like silhouettes, suggesting one of these is destined for fame on Xbox Live.

Xbox Live will support just eight players, which is apparently due to the size of the arenas and the balance of the game. The usual array of multiplayer modes remain (such as Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch and Capture The Flag) and would be the same as before if it wasn't for the dramatically different way this game plays. At this stage in development the mad, melee-led gameplay can seem quite random with hits not really connecting properly and kills and deaths often appearing to be chance events. Extended play does reveal the methods with which to garner regular success, but the game lacks the precision-sport-like feel of previous *Unreal* adventures and, indeed, every other respected FPS game. Epic Games maintains the collisions are still to be refined, but this is a small part of a much larger problem…

The biggest challenge facing *Unreal Championship 2* is the fact it has radically changed something fans have grown to love. What we've played of *The Liandri Conflict* so far we found quite fun, and as its own new breed of game would probably go down quite well, but it's just not *Unreal*. As an *Unreal* game this prompts the same reactions we had when we saw the updated versions of the original *Star Wars* films – some things just shouldn't be changed.

TWEAK ME, BABY, ONE MORE TIME

Despite our reservations about *UC2*'s balance, Epic Games is keen to fix it even after the game's release. The plan is that small files that govern the health and damage maths of the game will be placed onto the player's Xbox hard drive. These can then be changed when a user connects to Xbox Live in order to tweak the balance of the game. Epic plans to use stats and user feedback to find out where adjustments need to be made. For instance, if lots of players keep choosing the same character or weapon, then the balance can be skewed, taking away unfair advantages certain items may have. Epic stresses this won't be a regular process, but it's nice to know balance issues can be resolved after the game has shipped.

"AT THIS STAGE IN DEVELOPMENT THE MAD, MELEE-LED GAMEPLAY CAN OFTEN SEEM QUITE RANDOM"



This is just one of the many special Adrenaline-fuelled abilities available in the game.

LEGO STAR WARS

"AREN'T YOU A LITTLE SHORT FOR A STORMTROOPER?"

PS2 **Can the age of the truly awful *Star Wars* game really be over?** With titles like *Battlefront* and *Knights Of The Old Republic* restoring our faith in games based on the *Star Wars* franchise, people have begun to expect great things from the licence. We've had a good run of late – there's been no *Obi-Wan* or *Masters Of Teräs Käsi* for a while and we can look forward to forthcoming releases with the minimum of worry. Unless, that is, you object to the idea of replacing everyone in the *Star Wars* universe with tiny toy characters with clamps for hands.

The *Star Wars* side of the game is as faithful to the movies as any other title based on arguably the world's strongest licence, possibly more so than most. From a Cantina hub you'll have a choice of which movie's narrative to follow (*The Phantom Menace*, *Attack Of The Clones* and *Revenge Of The Sith* being your options, leaving ample scope for a classic trilogy-based sequel if this crossover title is well received) and the action and cut-scenes are both reproduced perfectly.

Control is simple but effective and there's a whole host of characters to switch between, from the Force-wielding Jedi who can manipulate the building-block environments to droids that can get you through security doors. Fans of characters created to bring in money from merchandise will also be overjoyed to hear that floppy-eared twit Binks returns. His special ability? A slightly higher jump and a bit more speed. Unfortunately, you'll actually need to use him at times.

As for the Lego aspect, again it's hard to find fault. Defeated enemies fall to pieces as you'd both expect and hope, craft look so freshly pieced together that the instructions may as well be sat next to them, and with a little help from the Force things like grates can be broken down and rebuilt into other objects. This system is as simplistic as can be but is all the more enjoyable for it – a *Psi-Ops*-style method of Force manipulation would be great but we can see where boredom could set in from moving brick after tiresome brick individually.

Break out of the confines of Story mode and you're able to throw any character you've unlocked into any of the game's scenarios, however unsuitable they may be for the events in question. We're not sure which names we're allowed to mention without risking multi-billion dollar lawsuits, but with a little imagination you're bound to get a rough idea of the sort of characters you'll be guiding around the plastic worlds. There are all manner of unlockables and bonuses up for grabs too, not to mention the well-implemented two-player mode. Puzzles will require you to combine your efforts effectively and even if you've not got a friend holding a second controller, allies will be computer controlled to allow you to get through even the trickiest section.

The build we saw was still a work in progress – some pieces fitted together perfectly, others didn't quite click, while the last few pieces were missing entirely. But it didn't matter. There's just a certain charm exuded by just how well-implemented both *Star Wars* and Lego themes are and how well they gel in creating a great action game. Although it's not exactly aimed at us, we look forward to enjoying the *Star Wars* universe in a way we'd never have predicted. Somehow, we doubt *Lego Harry Potter* would have quite the same allure.

"WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM THE FORCE, THINGS LIKE GRATES CAN BE BROKEN DOWN AND REBUILT INTO OTHER OBJECTS"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Eidos
DEVELOPER: Traveller's Tales
RELEASE: April '05
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

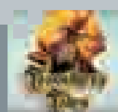
What's this? A decent adventure based on two of the least reliable properties in gaming? Believe it. This may be aimed primarily at kids but it's still a good laugh.

MAY THE BLOCKS BE WITH YOU

One of the nicest touches in *Lego Star Wars* is the variety from level to level. While one stage may see your blocky Jedi scything through hordes of Battle Droids, others may involve racing, flying or platforming to keep the player from growing bored. Basically, if you've seen it in one of the new *Star Wars* films, expect to recreate it here – attention to detail is wonderful and there are some great touches that play on the game's toy basis. If only it didn't remind us quite so much of the Lego reworking of *Knights Of The Round Table* from the *Holy Grail* DVD…



Stormtroopers still rule even when they're little more than an inch tall.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Most likely to be remembered as the company with the skills to make *Crash Bandicoot* worse than it already was, UK-based Traveller's Tales has actually put out a decent spread of titles dating back to the 16-bit era. Could this be the game to get it back on track?

HISTORY

- **CRASH BANDICOOT: THE WRATH OF CORTEX** 2001 [Multi]
- **PUGGSY** 1993 [Mega Drive]
- **LEANDER** 1992 [Amiga]

"LEGO STAR WARS COMBINES TWO CHILDHOOD FAVOURITES, LEGO AND STAR WARS, TO CREATE AN INNOVATIVE AND EXCITING ACTION-ADVENTURE TITLE"
EIDOS PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

PIECING LEGO STAR WARS TOGETHER

STAR WARS – ANNOYING ACTORS + AWESOME TOYS = LEGO STAR WARS

We know we shouldn't be excited, but look – it's *Star Wars*. In Lego. Great.

RESIDENT EVIL 4



■ This is the log cabin owner, the first character you meet, but he's not the most hospitable of hosts…

"RESIDENT EVIL HAS ALWAYS BEEN ABOUT THE STORY MORE THAN ANYTHING, WHICH IS ONE REASON WHY WE CAN TAKE IT IN A MORE ACTION-ORIENTED DIRECTION"

HIROYUKI KOYABASHI, RESIDENT EVIL 4 PRODUCER

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

SURVIVAL HORROR GETS ITS OVERDUE MAKEOVER

SLICK CONTROLS + CLASSIC HORROR - TURNING ON THE SPOT = RESIDENT EVIL 4



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Capcom has many familiar names under its banner such as *Street Fighter*, *Mega Man, Final Fight* and *Devil May Cry*. Even in the survival horror genre, it's not just *Resident Evil* that Capcom produces but also the *Dino Crisis* series.

HISTORY

- **RESIDENT EVIL 3: NEMESIS** 2003 [Cube]
- **RESIDENT EVIL 2** 2003 [Cube]
- **RESIDENT EVIL** 2002 [Cube]





As you might expect, blood and gore aren't really spared as Capcom goes crazy with the claret.

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q1 '05 (Japan: 31 Dec, US: 11 Jan)
GENRE: Survival Horror
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

It's a major series overhaul as *Resident Evil 4* steps into the modern era by cranking up the action and tension.

CAPCOM FINALLY REALISES IT'S 2004

To cut to the chase there's no more turning on the spot, no more firing blind off-screen and no more fixed camera angles. At last, Capcom has realised it's 2004 and put its famed survival horror series through the wringer, and it's come out looking unrecognisable from the game that shuffled onto PlayStation back in 1996. Back then, it amused with its bad voice acting before scaring with its dog-through-the-windows stunt. Having recently played the latest demo of *Resident Evil 4*, it's safe to say that while the clunky dialogue seems to have remained, the horror has evolved beyond a one-trick show.

Kicking off in dry, lifeless woods, with a collapsed bridge eliminating any way of getting back, the only way forward is towards an ominous log cabin. Following a rather one-sided conversation with the angry resident, he lurches towards you and you're dropped straight into the action. That's when you raise your gun for the first time and when you realise just how intuitive it feels having the camera sit on your shoulder. Auto-aiming is a thing of the past and you now have to rely on your shooting skills to get you out of trouble. Shoot an enemy's limbs and they stagger back, clutching the injured part of their body. Shoot the weapon-holding hand and you effectively disarm them. Shoot their heads and, well, you can imagine the rest.

It's not just shooting and moving that change the survival horror dynamics, with more context-sensitive controls coming into play. It's rare to find any situation where the A button doesn't have some use. The demo we played was short yet it still showed how A can cover everything from kicking zombies away and pushing down ladders to launching yourself through windows for an improvised escape route. Even the more predictable commands such as opening doors have been altered, with a gentle tap of A resulting in a stealthy approach while a forceful press sees Leon boot the door open. The infamous clunky controls of the past are nowhere to be seen. It's a revelation not only for the *Resident Evil* series but the survival horror genre as a whole.

With the new controls allowing Leon to defend himself with a confidence and fluidity never seen before in the series, Capcom has upped the action to match his new skills. To give an example, the first set of locals you meet are relatively benign, as you sneak towards them and dispatch them with ease. Then a howl can be heard from a distant villager calling for reinforcements and the camera cuts away to another angry mob running towards you. Panic quickly sets in. Villagers throw axes from roof-tops, set up ladders to climb after you and attack in groups, breaking into a run to give chase and always finding a way to unnerve you. There's a real feeling of you versus them, with no loading-door safety barriers to protect you or provide respite.

> "THE NEW CONTROLS ALLOW LEON TO DEFEND HIMSELF WITH A CONFIDENCE AND FLUIDITY NEVER SEEN BEFORE IN THIS FRANCHISE"

It's going to be a tough act to keep up over the course of a full game, and with screenshots suggesting Leon's sidekick, Ashley, plays a major part in proceedings, her AI will be crucial to whether her inclusion delights or frustrates. Still, it's so far so good for *Resident Evil 4* and it looks like survival will take priority over key management in horror games once more.

WEAPON OF CHOICE

Oh, those loveable, cheeky scamps on the internet. Turn your back for one minute and the next thing you know they're hacking into your latest demo and spilling the secrets of a leftover weapon list that seems to have been left in by mistake. Gameplay videos have already confirmed most of what the weapon list has to offer, such as the Sniper Rifles and Rocket Launcher. What's interesting is that there appear to be several different types of handgun, but best of all is the – look away now if you don't want to spoil things for yourself – Super Magnum. Judging by tradition, we're guessing it will be unlockable for the second time through, but even so, blasting the heads clean off zombies with a Super Magnum? Where do we sign up?


eMag

SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY

YOU CAN TEACH AN OLD DOG NEW TRICKS AFTER ALL



There's a new range of stealth kills – those guards won't know what hit them.

Having played its masterstroke of Xbox Live multiplayer modes in *Pandora Tomorrow*, Ubisoft will be hard-pressed to come up with 40 more reasons to shell out for *Chaos Theory*. So far, there's the promise of non-linear levels, obligatory improved lighting effects and a licensed soundtrack to go along with new split-screen multiplayer. But the real selling point for *Chaos Theory* is the fact that Sam Fisher's been learning some new moves since neutralising Norman Soth in LAX airport.

Previously, Fisher had two options if he wanted to eliminate a threat – snipe from a distance or get up close and personal to deliver an elbow to the back of the head. However, the Black Ops agent now has moves that reflect his day job, being able to neck-chop adversaries and silently catch the body or use his knife from close range to make sure the guards stay down.

You'll have read in our previous previews that Fisher can use his legs to dangle from pipes, leaving his hands free to snap the necks of unwitting guards below. Now he has an open-palm strike should he get spotted and have no gun to hand, a move that sends enemies flying backwards, giving the agent time to scarper. These extra moves will hopefully recapture the excitement felt when we first saw Fisher forward roll or split jump, as well as heightening *Splinter Cell*'s primal thrill of stalking guards and silently taking them down in pitch-black darkness.

> "THE REAL SELLING POINT FOR CHAOS THEORY IS THAT SAM FISHER'S BEEN LEARNING SOME NEW MOVES"

Nothing's being left to chance, with extra multiplayer modes also thrown in. The same mix of spies and mercenaries will duke it out in the new Disk Hunt, where spies gather a number of disks from across the map. If the mercenaries kill the disk-hoarding spy, the disks are lost and the spies need to start collecting again.

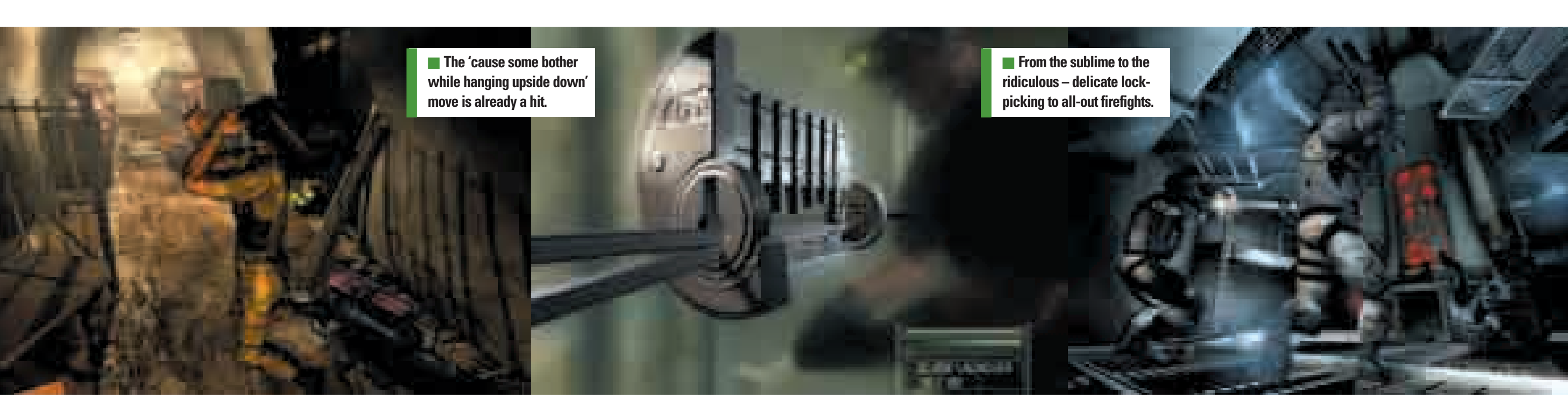
There are, of course, the usual concerns about whether the series-old problems of fluctuating artificial intelligence will be addressed. It would be a shame to have a great new move such as the open-palm strike over-used simply because the AI doesn't match the high standards set elsewhere.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q1 '05
GENRE: Stealth
PLAYERS: 1-2 (1-4 Online)

CONCEPT

Sam's back on the 'Box with some fancy moves. Nice.



The 'cause some bother while hanging upside down' move is already a hit.

From the sublime to the ridiculous – delicate lock-picking to all-out firefights.


eMag



MERCENARIES



If you do get control of a vehicle nearby friends will sometimes hop on.

THERE'S ALWAYS MONEY TO BE MADE FROM WAR

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: TBC
DEVELOPER: Pandemic
RELEASE: 18 Feb '05 (US: 11 Jan '05)
GENRE: Action Shooter
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

One war, many sides and plenty of work for a low-down dirty mercenary.

To call *Mercenaries* the *Grand Theft Auto* of war games would be rather misleading, but it's not too far off the mark. It features a huge free-roaming environment with sandbox gameplay, a mission tree that you can hop on or off as you see fit and a level of violence to sate the hungriest of hippos. So long as you have the money you can, at any point, call in air strikes, targeted missile hits, air drops of weaponry and much more. You'll also be able to control a huge range of vehicles including tanks, helicopters and anti-aircraft trucks, all of which can be 'action hijacked' à la *Halo 2*.

Yes, believe it or not this does include helicopters. Subtlety is not one of *Mercenaries*' strong points. As if proof of this is needed the game also uses the Havok physics engine. An odd choice, you might think, until you realise that every single building in the game can be reduced to rubble. That doesn't mean you can pop away with a cap gun to level a warehouse, you'll need bigger toys for that kind of work. In fact, the only piece of scenery that cannot be destroyed in *Mercenaries* is the humble tree, which for some reason the developer is rather fond of.

"EVERY SINGLE BUILDING IN THE GAME CAN BE REDUCED TO RUBBLE"



Call in an air strike and watch the plane deliver its payload.

What's the point of all this chaos and destruction? Well, you play a mercenary who's been dropped in North Korea and given the task of hunting down and killing The Deck Of 52 (nasty pieces of work led by The Ace Of Spades) who are trying to launch a nuclear attack. To stop them you need to seek help from the Russian Mafia, South Korea, North Korea, China and America, while simultaneously trying not to piss anyone off.

This makes for some fantastic gameplay as you find yourself constantly trying to play each side off against the other to get the job done. You don't want to annoy one side too much because you run the risk of gaining a new enemy and losing supplies. As you might have guessed, money plays a big factor here and in addition to the main missions you can also earn extra cash from a variety of non-essential side tasks.

Not only that but there are a hundred blueprints to find, a hundred statues to break, a hundred national treasures to hunt down and a hundred listing posts to blow up. This game is huge. It's the kind of game you can happily just mess around in for hours on end, completely ignoring the main plot and missions… and the outside world, of course.

HAUNTING GROUND

CAPCOM GIVES UP ZOMBIES FOR LENT

PS2 **Of all the genres you might care to mention, it seems to us that survival horror games tend to be some of the least plausible money can buy.** Packs of zombies, radios that can detect enemies, nonsensical arrangements of bullets and ink ribbons, impractical key locations… the list of improbabilities goes on. But then that's probably the appeal; a window into a horrendous world where normal things don't happen very often and only a couple of people live to tell the tale.

Cue *Haunting Ground*, a game based around a girl's escape from a creepy castle that promises eerie thrills to rival the likes of *Silent Hill*. Waking up naked in an abandoned castle can't be anyone's idea of a good time so it'll come as no surprise that Fiona, our heroine, doesn't find it very funny. And so begins her quest to find out where she is, how she got there and why the locals look so damn gormless.

While a new survival horror from Capcom may be no more surprising than getting milk from a cow, *Haunting Ground* (or *Demento*, as it's known in the east) looks to be carving its own niche within the crowded genre. The biggest 'unique' feature is Hewie the Alsation; freed by Fiona in the early stages of the game, your canine pal will have to be treated well if he's to trust you. And from what we've seen, you'll want him by your side as the game progresses. His canine abilities – ranging from picking up important scents and fetching items you can't quite reach to stalling enemies by clamping his jaws around them and generally annoying them – quickly become invaluable. It'll take some work to guide Hewie from thankful mutt to loyal companion but it beats being alone.

Another nice touch is the game's method of dealing with Fiona's fear. In addition to affecting the character's movement – sprints and strolls give way to blind panic when shocked or horrified, as last seen in *Clock Tower 3* – severe anxiety attacks will see colour drain from the screen and all manner of visual effects kick in to try to pass on some of this confusion and trepidation to the player. Hey, it worked for *Eternal Darkness* and there's no reason why Capcom shouldn't be able to pull it off just as well. And with Japanese actor and director Naoto Takenaka on board to make the game's cut-scenes as creepy and absorbing as possible, it looks as though *Haunting Ground* might well see the more fearful player leaping behind the sofa.

It's still a way off, but with a developer as familiar with the genre as Capcom, you have to expect good things from *Haunting Ground*. Conceptually and stylistically, the game brings new ideas to a crowded table, and provided the atmosphere – the key element in any game attempting to affect the player on a psychological level – can be established and maintained, we should be onto a winner.

As we've mentioned, there's a definite air of *Clock Tower* about the game, pinning much of the tension on suspense rather than gruesome or plentiful foes. Having said that, the hulking Debilitas is a far from pretty chap, and with a selection of such man-beasts roaming the castle and its grounds, keeping out of their way is order of the day. They have a tendency to snap necks first and bore you with dull conversations later…

> "SEVERE ANXIETY ATTACKS WILL SEE COLOUR DRAIN FROM THE SCREEN AND ALL MANNER OF VISUAL EFFECTS KICK IN"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q1 '05
GENRE: Survival Horror
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

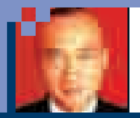
We've woken up in some pretty stupid places but never a dingy castle basement – protagonist Fiona does just that after a lot of booze (maybe) and has to escape. Spooky stuff.

RESIDENT EVIL

Meet Debilitas. This lumbering man mountain likes nothing better than to chase poor defenceless girls around before beating on them for fun. Thankfully, he's easily confused and by hiding under, behind or inside any cover you might find, it's easy to give the simpleton the slip. Better still, set your trusty hound Hewie on the towering freak and he'll gnaw at his ankles as if they were wrapped in prime steak, giving you ample opportunity to make a run for it. If the early stages offer this kind of unsavoury character, we can only imagine what manner of lummox will populate the later levels.



Fiona's faithful mutt proves that dogs, not diamonds, are a girl's best friend.



DIRECTOR PROFILE

Born in March 1956 in Kanagawa, Japan, Naoto Takenaka has been acting and directing since the early Eighties. Now, Capcom is calling upon his talents to direct the cut-scenes of *Haunting Ground* to ensure that the game is as cinematic as it can possibly be.

HISTORY

- **GHOST IN THE SHELL 2** VOICE ACTOR [2004]
- **PING PONG** ACTOR [2002]
- **NOWHERE MAN** DIRECTOR [1991]

"A COMPELLING STORYLINE IS UNVEILED TO THE PLAYER AS FIONA MAKES HER OWN REALISATIONS ABOUT HER PAST AND FUTURE"
CAPCOM PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

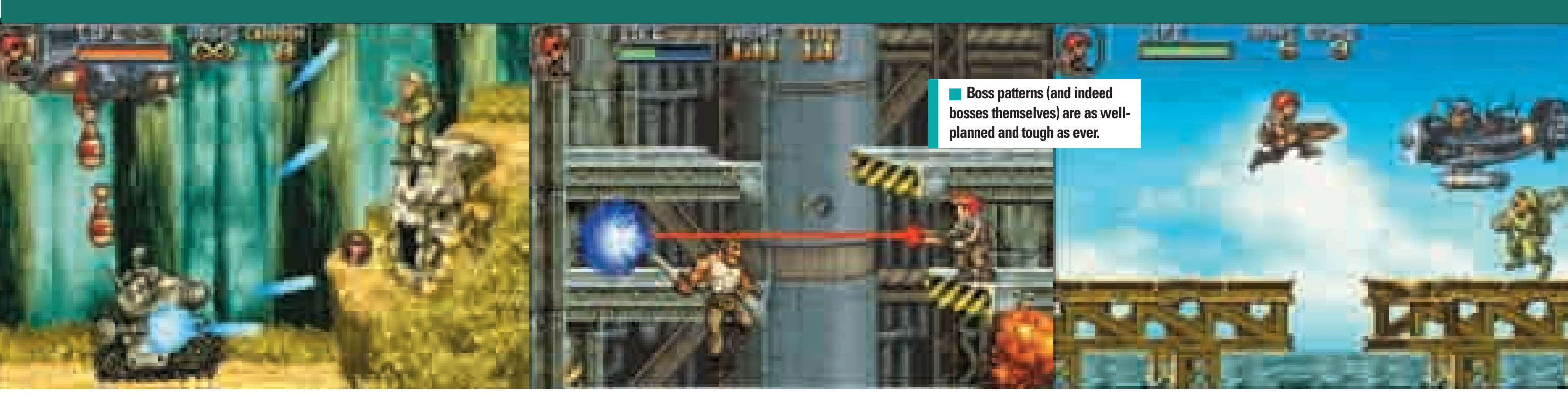
GIVING UP THE GHOST

CLOCK TOWER 3 + SILENT HILL + WANDERING OAFS = HAUNTING GROUND

Facing off against one of these wouldn't be so bad if it wasn't doing Atkins…


eMag

METAL SLUG ADVANCE



Boss patterns (and indeed bosses themselves) are as well-planned and tough as ever.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Game Boy Advance
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Ignition
DEVELOPER: SNK Playmore
RELEASE: TBC (Japan: Out Now)
GENRE: Shoot-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

If *Metal Slug* has taught us anything, it's that the first casualty of war isn't truth, it's credits. SNK tests your skill and patience again but on a smaller scale.

ANOTHER GLIMPSE OF A SHOOTING STAR

Unless you've accidentally sewn your eyes shut or have a memory span that even a goldfish would be ashamed of, we shouldn't have to explain the basics of *Metal Slug* – you run, you shoot, you die a lot. Except, of course, if you're awesome. Then you just die quite a bit. A Game Boy Advance addition to the series has always seemed like a logical progression given the nature of the games, and having finally wrapped our fingers around this portable version we couldn't be happier.

Visually speaking, this is a game far closer to the originals (or at least *Metal Slug X* on the PSone) than we had expected, which is especially exciting when you consider the steady frame rate even with a screen full of imminent death. Suffice to say that for a GBA title to be so near to the dizzy heights of arcade visuals on the eve of a new generation of handhelds gives us the kind of warm, pleasant feeling that can usually only be achieved by gorging on Ready Brek.

Cast your minds back to the two Neo Geo Pocket *Metal Slug* titles and you'll have a good basis for *Advance*. Rather than a fistful of lives with which to single-handedly win a war, a slightly more lenient energy bar allows you to use special weapons even after taking a hit or two. The trade-off here is that a powerful boss will annihilate you in two hits, and once that energy bar runs out the Mission Failed screen rears its familiar head. Unlimited continues and fairly generous checkpoints also balance out the slight disadvantage of a smaller screen, and although *MSA* is easily as tough as any game in the series the energy system as opposed to the series' typical one-hit kills makes it seem that much fairer.

There are plenty of additional touches that will keep you coming back for more scrolling carnage, some familiar and some suitably 'Game Boy-ish' – if we were to mention a card-collecting element, you'd see where we were going with that. These cards replace the usual collectables (apart from weapons) but like the prisoners you'll need to finish a level untouched if you want to keep your swag. *CT Special Forces* may have tided us over for now but give it a few months and we have little doubt that *Metal Slug Advance* will be back at the top, even in shrunken form.

"IF YOU QUITE FANCY DYING 217 TIMES DURING A HALF-HOUR BUS RIDE, THIS COULD BE FOR YOU"



If the enemy is using vehicles, jump in a plane or a tank and fight fire with cutesy war machines.

DEAD OR ALIVE ULTIMATE



"DEAD OR ALIVE ULTIMATE IS THE LINK TO THE FUTURE IN FIGHTING GAMES"
JOHN INADA, TECMO

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

TIGHTENING THE NUTS

DEAD OR ALIVE + DEAD OR ALIVE 2 x SPIT 'N' POLISH = DOA ULTIMATE

■ It's not just the characters that are amazing – just look at that background…

■ Punching your opponent into animals gets a pained reaction from the unlucky beast.

DEAD OR ALIVE ULTIMATE

XBOX



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Team Ninja is an instrumental force in Tecmo's development arsenal and is populated with some of the best 3D artists in the world. Known mostly for the *Dead Or Alive* series, Team Ninja also used its creative talents to resurrect Tecmo franchise *Ninja Gaiden*, to much critical acclaim.

HISTORY

- **NINJA GAIDEN** 2004 [Xbox]
- **DOA XTREME BEACH VOLLEYBALL** 2003 [Xbox]
- **DEAD OR ALIVE** 1997 [Saturn]



DEAD AND ON LIVE… NEXT MARCH



If it's possible for humans to ever actually 'love' virtual women, here's where it will happen. Once again, Team Ninja has created the most beautifully crafted female forms ever to fight each other in tight tops and pants, a fact that's unsurprising when you consider this is the studio that introduced 'realistic' buoyancy to the ladies' chests in the original *Dead Or Alive*.

Despite this wholly transparent selling ploy that made hardcore gamers doubt the quality of the gameplay, the first *Dead Or Alive* game was immensely playable, with a simple yet deep fighting system revolving around precision timing and reactions. It proved very popular in Japan and the series has improved with each sequel, making the series one of the most respected beat-'em-up franchises around and one that Microsoft is hoping will boost Xbox sales in the east.

While *Dead Or Alive Ultimate* is a two-disc collection of the original and its sequel, everything has been updated – or in some cases, reinvented – in order to make full use of the Xbox hardware and provide a purchasing incentive for what many may dismiss as a simple re-release. *Dead Or Alive*'s graphics have been suitably polished while *Dead Or Alive 2* has had so many nips, tucks, paintjobs and boob jobs it's barely the same game. And that's before you count online play for both games on Xbox Live – one of the most important additions to fighting games in years.

Ultimate's online functionality supports up to eight players per lobby, though a maximum of just four can fight at one time. The reason for eight-player lobbies is down to the 'online arcade' nature of the game, where modes such as Winner Stays On and Survival revolve around players sitting in line to fight the alpha-player in the group. Waiting your turn isn't as boring as it sounds – you get to watch the fight in Spectator mode and have full camera control as you do so, meaning you can amuse yourself by panning under the ladies as they throw each other into safari animals and off buildings. You can also chat with other spectators as you watch – ideal for comedy commentary, tactical breakdowns and tips on where to place the camera.

Other online modes include Loser Stays On (like Winner Stays On, but in reverse – odd), Tournament (a knock-out event thing) and Kumite, where a designated 'daddy' challenges people in the lobby until everyone decides to play something else. It's similar to Survival except Survival comes to an end when the 'daddy' loses.

The single-player aspect of the two games is standard *Dead Or Alive* fare, with Story, Time Attack, Survival, Sparring, Versus and Watch modes. As you go through the game with the 12 initially playable characters you'll unlock the vast assortment of extras, which you can then use online. These unlockables come in the form of levels, characters and a variety of entertaining costumes, such as bikinis, leather outfits and impractical military garb.

Despite reservations about this being an update of previous games instead of a brand new title, we're pleasantly surprised by the extra effort that's gone into it. There's so much to be sampled and unlocked this really could be the ultimate *Dead Or Alive* game.

"THERE'S SO MUCH TO BE SAMPLED AND UNLOCKED – THIS REALLY COULD BE THE ULTIMATE DEAD OR ALIVE GAME"

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Team Ninja
RELEASE: March '05 (US: Out Now)
GENRE: Beat-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1-8 (online)

CONCEPT

The original *Dead Or Alive* and its sequel – two games famous as much for bouncy chests as superb fighting mechanics – get makeovers, ready for their long-awaited Xbox Live debut.

RANKING OFF

Arcade gamers know about the kudos earned by being good at fighting games. Team Ninja understands this so has developed an online ranking mode that will put other lazy efforts (like *Burnout 3*'s rather simple system) to shame. Rankings are decided in two ways: first is your grade – points are earned during matches and these earn you a grade ranging from F to AA; then there's your rating – a score based on your win, lose, draw ratio and how many times you've mysteriously 'timed out' from games. With these ways of evaluating your skill, rankings are sure to mean more in *DOA Ultimate* than in *Burnout 3*, where they merely show how much time you spend online and how often you abuse the point distribution in Road Rage mode.



Here's one example of the many skimpy 'theme' outfits locked away in the game for your amusement.

MARIO POWER TENNIS

THE UMPIRE STRIKES BACK

You may think that with winter upon us the time for heading outdoors for some summer sports is over. You're right, of course, but Nintendo's podgy plumber is a man for all seasons and he won't let a little snow get in the way of his sporting activities.

Tennis is Mario's game of choice at the moment and it's been a while since he waved a racquet around, so you'd expect him to be a little rusty. It's been three years since he last showed off his forehand, and as the Game Boy Color and N64 *Mario Tennis* games were of a pretty high standard, he's got a lot to live up to.

Of course, it's difficult to enhance a tennis game. The basic rules have to stay the same – after all, anything else just isn't tennis – and with the N64 game being a title we still happily play today, we were expecting the improvements to be little more than graphical. With this in mind, you can imagine our whoops of joy upon finding out that a mere tarting-up is just the start of the improvements. More characters will be available for you to take onto the court and new modes that involve batting around Bob-ombs, Chain Chomps and suchlike will hopefully manage to entertain long after the appeal of slicing a little ball back and forth over a net has worn off.

Probably the biggest difference between this latest tennis title and any of the previous games is the fact that the characters will all have individual special abilities, so Mario will be bapping balls away with a giant hammer while Wario is using his extending racket to return those hard-to-reach shots. These moves should help turn the games, sets and matches on their heads and add to the already manic gameplay that's bound to be on offer.

That said, we're under no illusion that this won't be more than just shallow fun. Like *Toadstool Tour*, the *Mario Party* games and almost every other title where Mario's appeared recently, the focus will almost certainly be on simple playability and it's unlikely to challenge serious gamers. That's not to say we won't be playing it to death when it finally lands on our doormat – that damn 'Nintendo difference' gets us every time.

> "WE KNOW THIS WON'T BE ANY MORE THAN SHALLOW FUN, BUT WE'LL STILL PLAY IT TO DEATH"



Plenty of different modes will be available to hold your interest should you tire of regular tennis.

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Camelot
RELEASE: 25 Feb '05
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONCEPT

New balls, please. The Mario and friends have returned to the court.



The character-specific moves should make games even more chaotic.

One Boo isn't too bad, but even Waluigi can't deal with this many…


eMag

STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO



Characters from both *Episode II* and *III* appear throughout the game.

ANOTHER FIRST-PERSON CLONE?

The *Star Wars* name is no longer one to be feared on consoles – recent releases have been merciful departures from the dark days of cheap cash-ins. Expectations for all subsequent games have therefore risen and the pressure is on LucasArts to deliver another quality title with *Republic Commando*. And we really wouldn't like to be in those shoes…

This isn't just us being pessimistic, this game sees the *Star Wars* name take a very bold step into the first-person shooter arena – a notoriously busy genre on any platform, let alone the Xbox and PC. This is going to have to be something more than a bog-standard FPS to go up against the likes of *Halo 2*, *Doom 3* and *Half-Life 2*, but then it does have one very important factor running in its favour already – be it new or old trilogy it's still *Star Wars*.

Looking at the gameplay it seems as though LucasArts has (finally) realised the power of this magic, and *Republic Commando* feels like the healthy offspring of *Rainbow Six* and *Star Wars* – a winning combination if ever there was one. In the game you control an elite Clone Trooper leading a squad into battle against the evil Trandoshan hordes. The 14 missions of the game take you from the battle on Geonosis at the end of *Episode II* all the way up to the opening battle on Kashyyyk at the start of *Episode III*.

> "PRECISION IS LACKING BUT THE SIMPLICITY IS REFRESHING"

The squad control system is similar to that of *Rainbow Six*, only without all the complicated commands. The developer has clearly tried to streamline your options to keep the action running quickly and smoothly, a gamble that may or may not pay off. You cannot, for example, order your Clones to any point on the map of your choosing. Instead you'll find specific points throughout each mission (conveniently marked on your tactical HUD) that allow you to deploy your men. These include sniper points, door-breaching manoeuvres, computer use and so on.

These restrictions on when you can and can't use your men might put off some gamers but there is one feature that should counter that. At any point during a mission you can set your Clones in various modes. There's an attack mode that tells them to scout ahead hunting down enemy targets, a defensive mode that forces them to stay near you for cover, and a secure mode. This last mode can be used to get your elite squad to hold an area. Give this order and they'll take up positions within a room. It's not as precise as games like *Rainbow Six*, but then the simplicity makes for a refreshing change.

This also means you don't have to suffer the frustration of watching your men getting their way lines mixed up, getting stuck on walls and suchlike. The AI on show in *Republic Commando* already outstrips a lot of other squad shooters we've seen, and this is thanks to the fact that the control system is minimal. It's actually a shame you won't be able to take a group of AI with you onto Xbox Live as it would be interesting to see how they would react with each other. Of course, that won't stop you having fun online – up to 16 players will be able to take part in a variety of Clone versus Trandoshan team games.

It certainly seems as though *Republic Commando* has the content, and the gameplay definitely has potential. All that remains to be seen is whether LucasArts can keep the *Star Wars* name on the Light side.

DETAILS

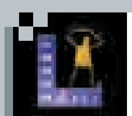
FORMAT: Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: LucasArts
RELEASE: 4 Mar '05 (US: 3 Jan '05)
GENRE: First-Person Shooter
PLAYERS: 1-16

CONCEPT

Take control of an elite Clone Trooper and lead your crack squad against the evil Trandoshan hordes in an action-packed version of *Rainbow Six*.

PLAY WITH YOUR WOOKIEE

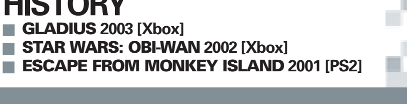
When asked about downloadable content for the Xbox Live side of the game, LucasArts hinted at the possibility of Wookiee team character models for download. Playing Clones versus Trandoshans on team games would be great fun, but imagine being able to join a squad of Wookiees in a fight across their home planet, Kashyyyk. The mere thought should weaken the knees of any *Star Wars* fan. There is a risk, of course, that you'll have to pay for this privilege but it should be worth it. As well as this you can expect some extra multiplayer maps not too long after release.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Formed in 1982 the software division of LucasArts is famous for a mixed bag of *Star Wars* games. However, the majority of these have been handled by external development teams. It's very rare to find a game like *Republic Commando* that's developed internally.

HISTORY



- **GLADIUS** 2003 [Xbox]
- **STAR WARS: OBI-WAN** 2002 [Xbox]
- **ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND** 2001 [PS2]

RENDEZVOUS WITH SQUAD

"WE'RE DEFINITELY TAKING THE BEST ELEMENTS OF RAINBOW SIX 3 AND OTHER GAMES"

CHRIS WILLIAMS, PRODUCER, REPUBLIC COMMANDO

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

STAR WARS SPECIAL FORCES

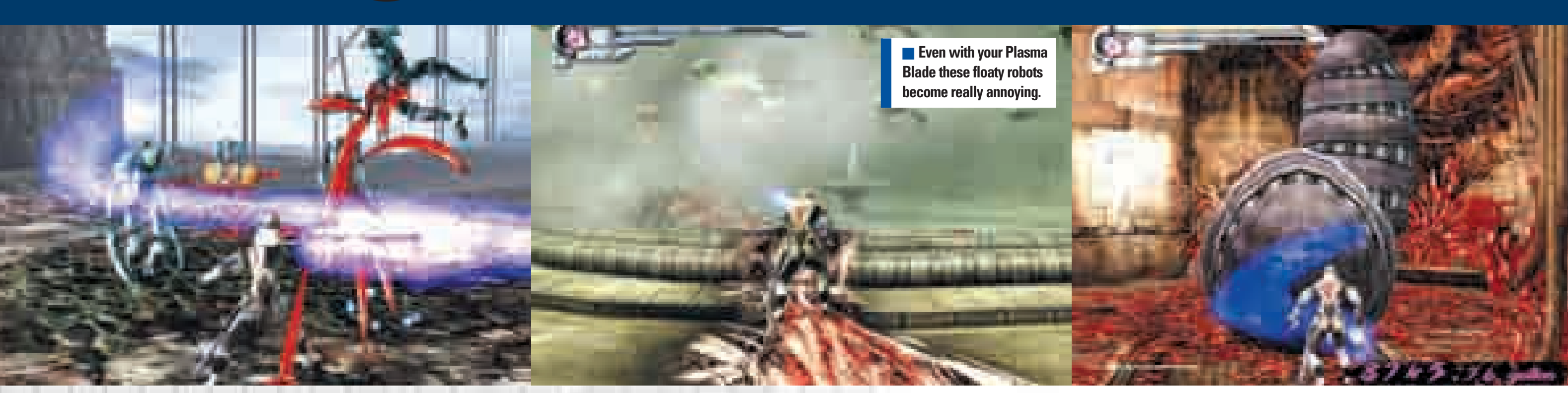
RAINBOW SIX - COMPLEXITY x STAR WARS COOL = REPUBLIC COMMANDO

ACCESS MAIN ELEVATOR

The game is running on an enhanced version of the new *Unreal* engine.

Your mission objectives vary but stealth is rarely a requirement.

NANOBREAKER



Even with your Plasma Blade these floaty robots become really annoying.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Dec '04
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Futuristic hack 'n' slash adventure where you get to fight and kill robots that bleed. A lot.

WHIP IT GOOD, YEAH

We'd all like our own pet robot to deal with those mundane chores while also making life better by offering occasional massages and cakes, but our metal friends are not without their risks. This risk is highlighted in Konami's new action adventure hack-o-thon *Nanobreaker*, where robots created to aid mankind end up getting ideas of death and world domination. It's the age-old story: man makes robot, robot serves man, robot formulates motivations beyond cleaning toilets and packing jam, robot kills man. Always the way, eh?

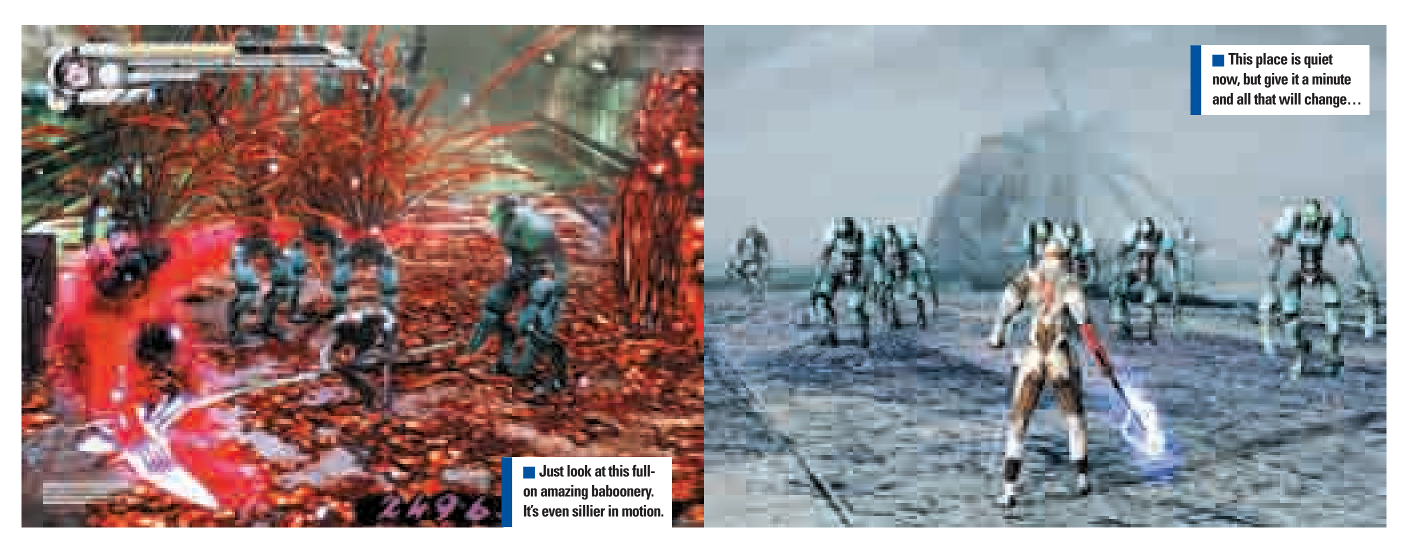
However, it's up to you – Jake Warren, a military cyborg torn between his human emotions and killer machine instinct – to stop the wayward droids from realising their plan of creating an army of world-conquering robots by harvesting all the iron and human blood they can lay their cold, shiny hands on.

You do this via a unique shape-shifting Plasma Blade that flows and whips as you attack the hordes of blood-heavy robots with your array of combinations. It's not a bad weapon to have in times of robot domination – you can slice horizontally or vertically and use it to grab hold of and pull your enemies towards you.

As you go about your travels, hacking up robots in a dazzling display of colour and pretty patterns, it's instantly noticeable how much blood these machines need in order to work properly. Imagine how the blood looks in some of *Mortal Kombat: Deception*'s gorier moves; triple it and you've some idea of the spillage involved here. Tackle a group of seven robots in a confined area and you'll completely redecorate the immediate environment. You really can paint the town red.

Which brings us to the depressing news that right now this over-the-top silliness is the only memorable thing about *Nanobreaker* – a shame, considering robots trying to take over the world sounds like a reasonably good idea for a game. It's even more of a shame when you realise Koji Igarashi, producer of the *Castlevania* games, has had a hand in this game's development. The gameplay is just too simple and repetitive – all you seem to do is hack up robots until you reach an end-of-level boss that requires you to understand its pattern and find its weakness. And no amount of silliness will make up for that.

"TACKLE SEVEN ROBOTS IN A CONFINED AREA AND YOU REALLY WILL BE PAINTING THE TOWN RED"



Just look at this full-on amazing baboonery. It's even sillier in motion.

This place is quiet now, but give it a minute and all that will change…


eMag

F.E.A.R.



"THE TEAM AT MONOLITH HAS SET A GOAL TO IMMERSE THE PLAYER IN AN INTENSE BLOCKBUSTER ACTION-MOVIE EXPERIENCE"
MICHAEL POLE, VP WORLDWIDE STUDIOS, VIVENDI UNIVERSAL

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

"THEY'RE COMING OUT THE GODDAMN WALLS!"

GUNS + GHOSTS x GORE = F.E.A.R.

■ As if being thrown through the air wasn't bad enough, wait until the bloodshed starts…



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Founded in 1994 and based in Kirkland, Washington, Monolith Productions has spent the last ten years evolving from its original publishing and developing roots into a firm focused specifically on game development. Titles such as *TRON 2.0, No-One Lives Forever* and *Aliens Vs Predator 2* have helped bolster the studio's reputation for quality.

HISTORY

- **TRON 2.0** 2003 [PC]
- **NO-ONE LIVES FOREVER 2** 2002 [PC]
- **ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2** 2001 [PC]



■ Apparently, your team has a special knack for dealing with threats no-one else can handle. Good job too, considering the circumstances.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Vivendi Universal
DEVELOPER: Monolith Productions
RELEASE: Q3 '05
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ First-person blasting meets gruesome survival horror as Monolith tries to scare everyone silly with its latest take on the FPS genre.

HERE COMES THE FEAR AGAIN, OH YEAH

Ah yes, Monolith, very clever – we see what you've done there. So you've got the acronym 'FEAR', which stands for First Encounter Assault and Recon (the special forces unit featured in the game, no less) and then there's 'F.E.A.R.' which spells, well, fear. Honestly, it's almost enough of a coincidence to make us think someone came up with the name on purpose, just to mess with our minds.

Thankfully, it's more than just the sledgehammer obviousness of the game's title that makes *F.E.A.R.* the kind of game to freak you out. Drawing on its experience with atmospheric first-person shooters (specifically, the tense drama of *Aliens Vs Predator 2* and the authentic movie stylings of *TRON 2.0*), Monolith is going all-out to bring us an FPS with a distinct paranormal twist – one that, according to the studio, could be thought of as *The Matrix* meets *The Ring*. It's an odd and potentially jarring combination, although we're pretty sure that all that means is plenty of guns mixed with a whole load of supernatural shenanigans… not to mention enough blood to make Dracula feel queasy.

The plot (or at least, what's been revealed of it so far) is riddled with enough clichés to make even Jerry Bruckheimer wince, but then we suspect that's the point. Pitching gung-ho special forces types against an unknown force that happily rips through men like they were paper, the results are deliberately intended to create the air of both high-octane action and suspense that only movies like *Aliens*, *Predator* and the like can deliver. Indeed, it's because of this that you can almost forgive the rather familiar-sounding set-up.

Take one multi-billion-dollar aerospace facility, have it invaded by an unidentified paramilitary force and then send in the Special Forces to investigate, only to see them massacred shortly after an eerie signal cuts off radio transmission. Enter second Special Forces team, stage right – that's you – with the remit of wiping out the intruders and finding out what happened before things get out of control. Like we said, it's trite but then we guess Monolith has more than a few surprises up its sleeve for when the action gets going.

And in that respect at least, Monolith has really tried to surpass all its previous efforts to create an FPS that delivers in every department. Visually, *F.E.A.R.* is already looking astounding, with some incredibly detailed damage models that impress as much as they horrify. Bodies fly across the room and slam into walls with sickening clarity, react realistically when shot and gush blood if you hit the right spot. Detailed wound points, realistic rag-doll movement, AI that responds according to damage caused… these are the things that a good FPS is made of. The same also goes for the scenery, with every bit of it just aching to be blown to pieces; clearly, Monolith has decided that the days of non-interactive backgrounds (which, if *Doom 3* has its way, weren't all that long ago) are well and truly numbered.

With Vivendi keeping playable code under wraps, it's difficult to be sure whether what we've seen already actually has gameplay to match the looks. That said, we're well aware of Monolith's ability to create both adrenaline-filled FPS action and nail-biting tension, so there's plenty of expectation being reserved for *F.E.A.R.*.

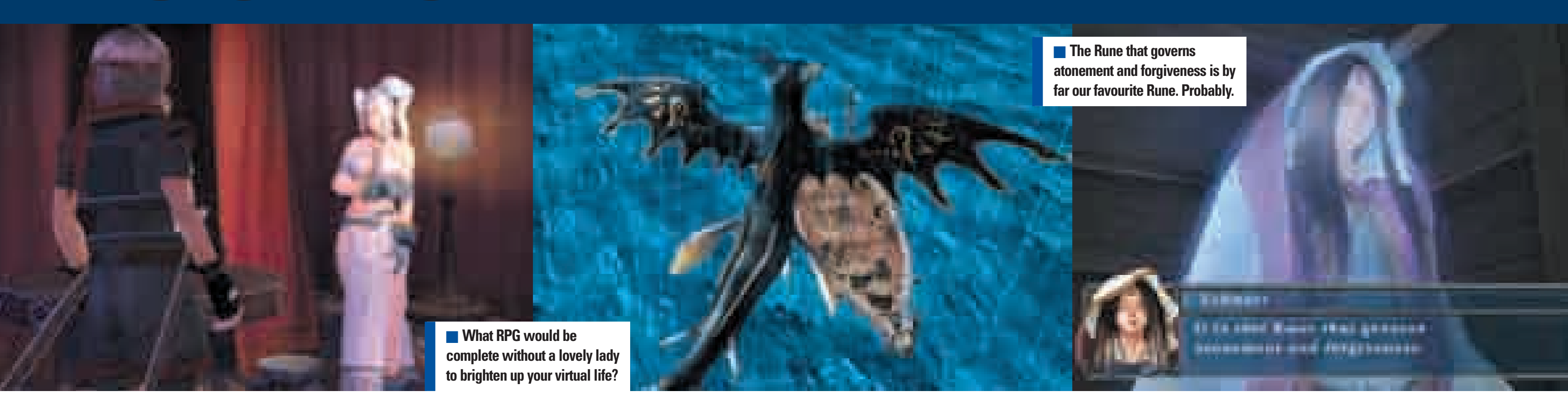
"SCARY LITTLE GIRLS USING TELEKINETIC POWERS TO TEAR GROWN MEN LIMB FROM LIMB? SOUNDS PRETTY TERRIFYING TO US"

FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHT

Although *F.E.A.R.* is primarily an FPS, Monolith has tried to combine traditional blasting action with other forms of combat to keep the action fresh. Using a contextually accurate system of moves depending on your circumstances (your proximity to the enemy, whether you're standing or crouching and so on), *F.E.A.R.* offers a range of attack options that can be used to take advantage of a situation. There's also the inclusion of hand-to-hand combat although how well this will work depends on how Monolith implements it; fans of *Chronicles Of Riddick* may insist that it can work, but we've played enough of *Breakdown* to know that it's a fine line between success and shambles.


eMag

SUIKODEN IV



What RPG would be complete without a lovely lady to brighten up your virtual life?

The Rune that governs atonement and forgiveness is by far our favourite Rune. Probably.

KONAMI PRESENTS AN RPG THAT'LL REALLY TAKE US BACK

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q2 '05
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

The *Suikoden* series continues as you visit a time before the first game.

PS2 **Most gamers are guilty of maybe spending a little too much time on quality RPGs.** Some games can drag on for months and you can't help but feel that apart from acquiring another notch on your gaming bedpost, you actually take very little away with you upon completion. It would be nice to learn a lesson. Like when Snarf would make an obvious error in the short clip at the end of every *Thundercats* episode and the other characters thought it was hilarious.

The *Suikoden* series, however, does provide food for thought (of sorts) as it was actually inspired by a Chinese story in which 108 ordinary people came together from varying backgrounds and accomplished a whole heap of amazing things by using their different skills and working as a team. Now there's a moral for you.

"THIS WILL BE THE FIRST TIME THE SERIES HAS APPEARED ON THE PS2 IN EUROPE"

Suikoden IV will be the first time the series has made it onto the PlayStation2 in our region after Konami seemed to forget to release the third instalment in Europe and left those gamers already deeply involved in the franchise with no option other than importing.

It seems likely that this latest title in the series will return to some of the ideas seen in the first game on the PSone as producer Noritada Matsukawa has revealed that he's been working closely with Junko Kawano (who was on the original *Suikoden* development team) on the game's storyline and character design.

It could be useful that some of the old crew is involved, as this new adventure will actually be set 150 years before the first *Suikoden* game and will focus on the adventures of a youngster who has come into possession of the mysterious Rune Of Punishment. Anything with such an ominous name can't be good for you and, sure enough, it's draining away the poor lad's life with every passing moment. The series' signature '108 Stars Of Destiny' theme will return, providing you with 107 different characters scattered throughout the world from which you can select your party (though this time around the party size will drop to a maximum of four rather than the six that was possible in the first three games).

Suikoden IV is unlikely to stray far from the quality of the rest of the series, and while they haven't ever been the best RPGs out there the *Suikoden* titles at least make you feel like Snarf at the end of *Thundercats*. Sort of.



This latest *Suikoden* world will again be populated with 107 potential party members.

SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

NBA STREET V3

STILL GOT LOVE FOR THE STREETS?

Format: PS2, Xbox, Cube
Origin: Canada
Publisher: EA Sports BIG
Developer: EA Canada
Genre: Sports
Players: 1-4



EA's Sports BIG titles have always been the ones that have given us the most pleasure – more so, even, than its 'proper' sports games. As such, the thought of being able to enjoy yet another slice of street-style basketball action is a good one, although we're rather sceptical as to what enhancements EA is likely to make over *NBA Street 2*. Certainly, there's plenty of scope for expanding the player customisation and the range of moves available, but that's simply window dressing. Whether we'll actually see any genuine gameplay improvements, save some more tinkering with the Gamebreaker system, remains doubtful. Still, any chance to show off our balling skills is always welcome.

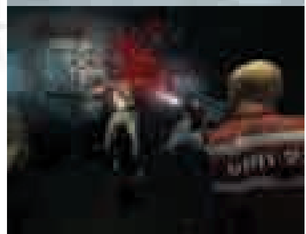
RELEASE DATE: Q2 '05

COLD FEAR

AT SEA, NO-ONE CAN HEAR YOU SCREAM

Format: PS2, Xbox, PC
Origin: France
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Darkworks
Genre: Survival Horror
Players: 1





A survival horror set at sea? It's not a crazy idea, or even an original one – *Resident Evil: Dead Aim* having already been there, done that – but *Cold Fear* certainly looks the part. Set on both a drifting Russian whaling ship and a mysterious oil rig in the middle of a howling storm on the Bering Sea, players must guide a lonely coastguard responding to a distress signal through all manner of dangers (including a horde of mutants who may or may not have once been human) by using the interactive backgrounds. It sounds feasible enough, but we just hope that the game manages to best Darkworks' last title, the somewhat disappointing *Alone In The Dark 4*.

RELEASE DATE: MARCH '05

BOILING POINT: ROAD TO HELL

WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

Format: PC
Origin: Ukraine
Publisher: Atari
Developer: Deep Shadows
Genre: FPS
Players: 1

Jungle combat in first-person shooters in nothing new; we've trudged through the Vietnamese undergrowth and visited lush desert islands more than once. However, Atari's attempt to recreate the dangerous jungles of South America (complete with all the guerrilla warfare contained therein) may prove different enough to hold your attention. In a world that spans hundreds of square kilometres – a constantly streaming one with no loading times, according to developer Deep Shadows – and offers a range of weaponry and vehicles, players can interact with AI factions and undertake missions as they see fit depending on how they wish to ally themselves. A first-person, jungle-based *GTA*? Perhaps…

RELEASE DATE: Q1 '05

IN MEMORIAM 2 [WORKING TITLE]

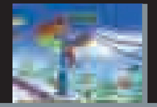
THE PHOENIX RISES ONCE AGAIN

Format: PC, Mac
Origin: France
Publisher: TBA
Developer: Lexis Numérique
Genre: Puzzle
Players: 1



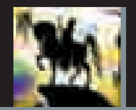
Checked your email recently? If you were lucky enough to complete *In Memoriam* (Lexis Numérique's *Se7en*-esque PC puzzler), you probably should – there might be a letter from The Phoenix waiting for you. Having escaped at the end of the last game, it looks like he's back for revenge… or rather, there's a sequel on the way. So far, details are scant although the brief movie clip shown on The Phoenix's website suggests we can expect more mind-bending puzzles and problems that can only be solved after extensive internet searching – which, not surprisingly, is exactly what fans of the original game want. There's no word yet on whether Ubisoft will be handling publishing duties again, but we'll keep our fingers crossed

RELEASE DATE: TBA '05



Delayed – Mario Party 6 [GameCube]

■ Just like its handheld cousin, the 'bigger' GameCube version of Mario's latest party game (complete with microphone) has slipped from its original Christmas release to a more conservative March 2005.



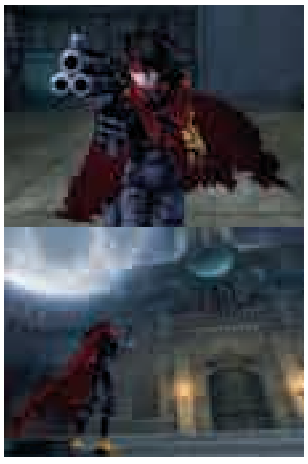
Delayed – The Fool And His Money [PC/Mac]

■ Despite being promised in time for Halloween, Cliff Johnson's much-anticipated metapuzzle sequel to cult classic *The Fool's Errand* has now moved back even further to early July 2005. Dammit.

FINAL FANTASY VII: DIRGE OF CERBERUS

OI, DANTE – VINCENT'S BACK

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: In-House
Genre: RPG
Players: 1



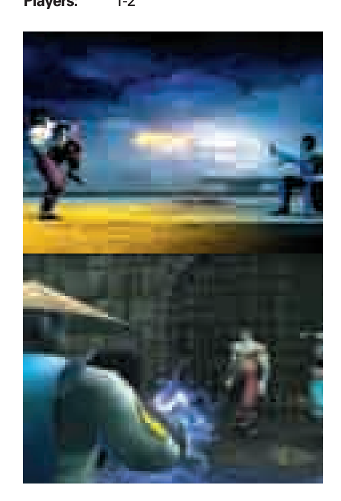
Considering the amount of excitement that *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* (a mere animated movie) generated with the fans, we don't doubt that *Dirge Of Cerberus* has them drooling with anticipation. Set three years after the end of *FFVII*, this latest adventure sees Vincent Valentine take the lead, with a visual style akin to *Final Fantasy X* and *X-2* (albeit a whole lot darker). However, the game is an action title with RPG elements as opposed to the other way round; the combat system, for example, moves the action into real-time and places the camera behind Vincent for an almost *Devil May Cry*-style experience. It's a diversion for the series, certainly, but one that Square Enix no doubt hopes will keep the fans happy.

RELEASE DATE: TBA '05

MORTAL KOMBAT: SHAOLIN MONKS

THIRD TIME LUCKY, MIDWAY?

Format: PS2, Xbox
Origin: US
Publisher: Midway
Developer: In-House
Genre: Action Adventure
Players: 1-2



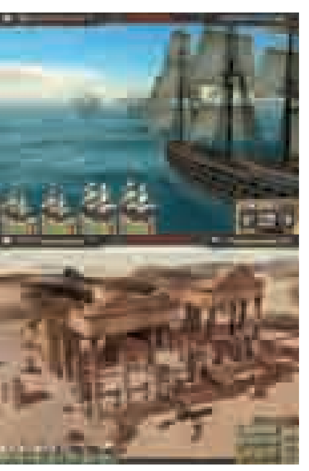
While we quite like *Mortal Kombat*, we wouldn't say we like it enough to see a new game every year, particularly one that offers anything other than one-on-one brawling action. Nevertheless, that's exactly what Midway is making with *Shaolin Monks* – a game that moves the series back into the action-adventure genre that we hoped had been left behind with the *Special Forces* games. Details released so far promise action-based puzzles, interactive arenas (acid pits, spiked ceilings and the like) and new Fatalities, as well as boss battles and appearances from your 'favourite' *MK* characters. But we can't help being sceptical until Midway proves that *Shaolin Monks* is a game worth caring about.

RELEASE DATE: Q3 '05

IMPERIAL GLORY

NO GUTS, NO GLORY

Format: PC
Origin: Spain
Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Pyro Studios
Genre: RTS
Players: 1-2



First *Rome: Total War*, and now every publisher wants a game that has a map teeming with thousands of characters at once. On top of Ubisoft's *Alexander* there's *Imperial Glory*, a game that takes the concept of large-scale warfare and ups the ante even further. Naturally, the game offers both turn-based management gameplay and real-time battles spread across five great empires – Britain, France, Russia, Prussia and Austro-Hungary. However, the big difference is that *Imperial Glory*'s combat takes place on both land and sea, with massive 3D naval battles being tossed in alongside those fought on dry land. It's an ambitious project, but what we've seen suggests that the game will be more than competent when it arrives.

RELEASE DATE: TBA '05

COMMANDOS: STRIKE FORCE

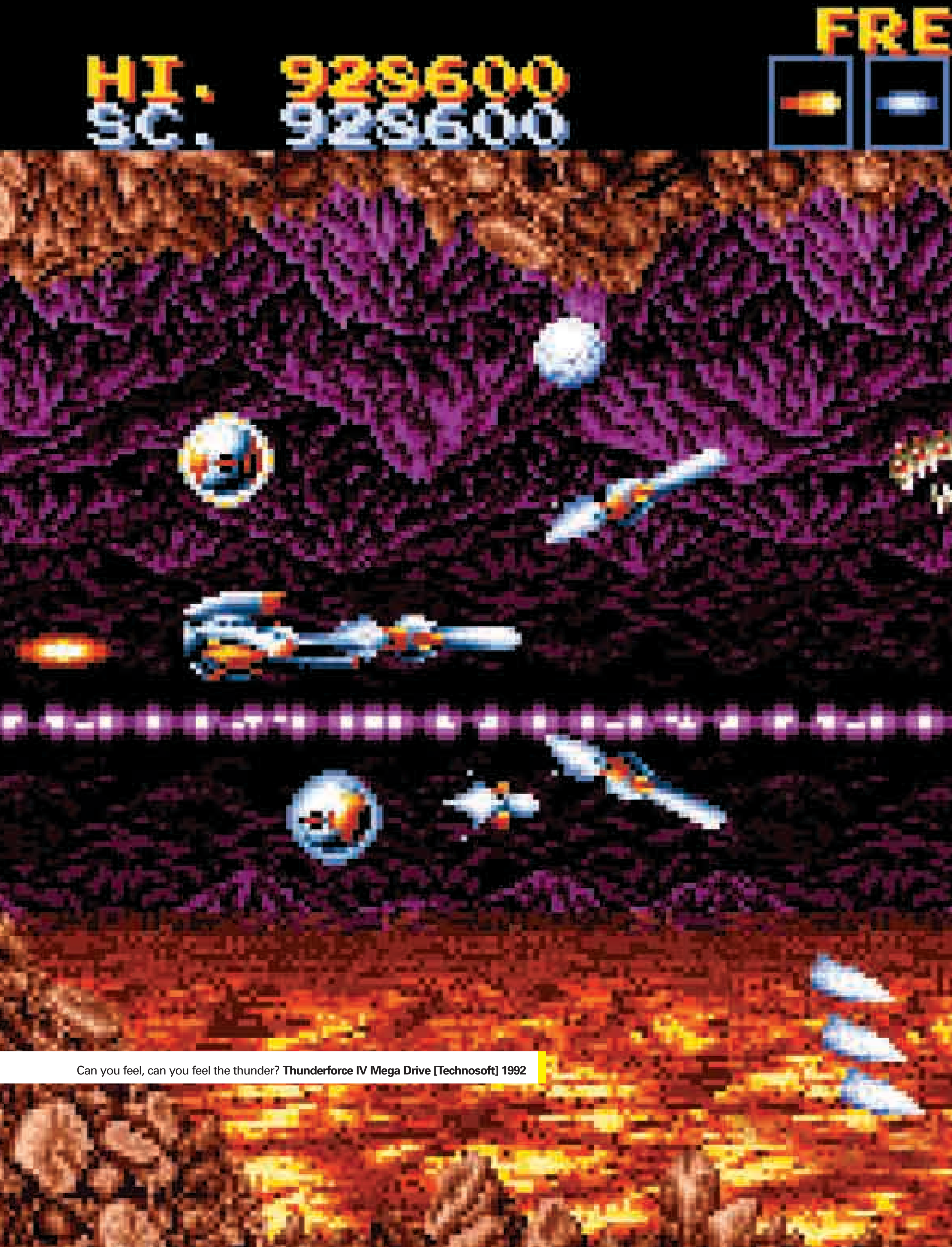
A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH

Format: PS2, Xbox, PC
Origin: Spain
Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Pyro Studios
Genre: FPS
Players: 1-2



Of all the games we'd have expected to move from top-down isometric gameplay to the FPS genre, *Commandos* would have been fairly low on our list. And yet here it is, *Commandos: Strike Force*, a game that takes all the elements of the action RTS series (multiple characters to control, numerous weapons and lots of Nazis) and slaps them into a first-person shooter. Players can still switch between the different members of their 'strike force' (the Green Beret, the Sniper and the Spy) in order to use their individual skills, all of which are necessary if you want to escape alive. Whether it'll work in FPS form is, of course, another matter but we won't have to wait long to find out.

RELEASE DATE: Q1 '05



Can you feel, can you feel the thunder? **Thunderforce IV Mega Drive [Technosoft] 1992**


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Are You Expe

IT'S TEN YEARS SINCE THE PLAYSTATION DEBUTED IN JAPAN. TEN YEARS THAT HAVE CHANGED THE FACE OF GAMING. WHAT IS IT ABOUT SONY'S LITTLE GREY BOX THAT MADE ALL THE DIFFERENCE?



It's almost hard to believe, but there was a time when the word PlayStation meant nothing. There was a time when a parent, speaking to another parent about any games system their child wanted for Christmas, would say "he wants one of those Nintendo things". There was a time when the word 'PlayStation' written in the preview pages of a games magazine looked alien. Play. Station. PlayStation. Yes, there was a time when PlayStation didn't exist.

How does it happen? How does a brand name become so etched in the consciousness of a generation? Sure, you could say that it's all about units shifted, and marketing savvy, and 'installed base', and you'd be right, to an extent. But what else is there in a name? What else is there in the Play and the Station and the magic of the non-space in between?

To understand the why, we first have to look at the when. The back story of the PlayStation is often told, and is a tale of a time when there was a proposed Nintendo


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PlayStation
PlayStation
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ANALOG

PLAY STA TION

alliance, and a space in between 'Play' and 'Station'. This time doesn't concern us. The time that does concern us is 1993, when the space between had vanished, and the PlayStation was announced to the world.

"PlayStation. The word just evokes happiness with the technical savvy suggested by 'station' and its joyous prefix of 'play'," says Brian Gray, the executive editor of the PSXNation website. "I remember the day the PlayStation launched in the US. Few knew what it was or what it meant. For us it meant a near arcade-perfect port of *Mortal Kombat 3*, it meant using CDs instead of cartridges, it meant an underdog newcomer we could root for."

The key time, the time of the US and UK launch of the PlayStation, was late 1995, a year after the console made its debut in Japan. Underdog newcomer? Regardless of the accuracy of that statement, people did root for the PlayStation. Gaming would never be quite the same.

The PlayStation itself, in your hands, is an unassuming machine. Grey plastic that gets tatty easily, a power and reset button that don't have a great sensation of give to the touch, and a pop-up top that will either spring hard or rise smoothly – like operating Arkwright's till every time you want to play a game. The PlayStation logo looks very dated ten years on, and it never looked very modern in the first place. The controllers are lightweight, and they always seemed a bit too small, always seemed an exercise in practicality over comfort or innovation. Now, grab your PlayStation. Hold it, caress it – where's the magic? Give the machine a shake, see if you can… actually, don't shake it. The lasers were always a bit dodgy too.

So where is that magic? It surely can't be in the weight or feel of the machine. It's a special something as intangible as the space between Play and Station.

"It has to be the games. It's always the games, when it comes down to it," says Japanese gamer Koichi Tokumoto. "The games give us our great memories. The games bring us around the machine with our friends. The machine is just the facilitator. PlayStation doesn't describe a machine. It describes a shared nostalgia."

It's the closest thing we have to the seeds of an understanding of the PlayStation appeal. A shared nostalgia? A shared gamers' consciousness? It sounds pretentious, of course, but consider what the word 'Casablanca' means to film aficionados. Does it just refer to a great 1942 movie starring Bogart and Bergman? Or does every utterance of it describe the emotions they felt when they first watched the movie? Does it flip a switch in their head that brings back the tension, and the heartbreak, and the memory of what girl or guy they shared the experience with and whether or not they managed to steal a little kiss afterwards?

Perhaps it's gamers who have the key to all of this, and not the players in the industry. Gamers are the ones who bought, kept buying and championed PlayStation. Within the industry it's often hard for people to see the wood for the trees. Business intrudes, market rivalries often linger as long-term grudges, and even people like EA founder Trip Hawkins, one of gaming's biggest names and greatest minds, has nothing to offer when asked about the console. "This may strike you as odd but I don't have anything constructive to say about the PlayStation." It shouldn't strike us as odd. The PlayStation did what Trip proposed his 3DO console would do - unite gamers. "I think others are better qualified to comment," he says. Over to the qualified, then. Us.

PlayStation brought gamers crawling out from a darkened place into public perception. People who didn't play games saw people who did as geeks, overgrown kids, social retards. All of this changed with the PlayStation. Why? Was it the much-touted celebrity fans? The Jarvis Cockers and Damon Albarns, happy to be name-checked in a gaming publication or appear at a Sony publicity junket with a controller held upside down in their hands, bouncing off every wall in every *WipEout* track? Perhaps. Was it the crafty move of dressing conventional games as 'druggy' or 'dancey' and installing them in London nightclubs, with the hope that their very existence within that context would explode the idea of 'kid in bedroom with sweaty hands?' Perhaps. Was it just stars aligning, with the media looking for a new craze to inflate, technology becoming the fashionistas' new talking point, and games magazines moving on from words like 'pants' and 'cack' to words like 'zeitgeist' and 'myriad'? Probably. What cannot be ignored is the fact that, on recollection, it seemed that everyone was suddenly happy to be seen playing games. The lines had blurred.

"PEOPLE WHO DIDN'T PLAY GAMES SAW PEOPLE WHO DID AS GEEKS, OVERGROWN KIDS, SOCIAL RETARDS. ALL THIS CHANGED WITH PLAYSTATION"

In 1995, when the PlayStation first forced its way into the hearts and minds of an unsuspecting public, Violet Berlin was best known as the presenter of *Bad Influence* a TV videogame show for kids. Now, the landscape has changed. She's



FROM TRASH TO ART

The success of the PlayStation heralded the dawn of a new era in the marketing of consoles. In stark contrast to the primary-coloured, hysterical games ads of the past, PlayStation rode on a wave of TV and cinema ads that have been deemed worthy of study in film schools almost a decade later.

Considering that most games ads used to feature bespectacled kids waving controllers at sweaty musclemen in loincloths who just happened to 'stumble' into their bedroom, the PlayStation spots were quite a shock to the system. Sony was attempting to distance itself from the menace of common perception.

Frank Budgen's stunning 'Double Life' commercial featured a wide range of people, from different walks of life, taking turns to speak to us. A shaven-headed woman in a gloomy tunnel tells us "I have commanded armies…" and a hooded child in stark black-and-white follows her with "…and conquered worlds." A pregnant woman holds her naked child close to tell us that she has no regrets. An ordinary guy in a darkened bedroom says, "at least I can say I've lived." And then we are told not to underestimate the power of PlayStation. Or, it seems, the power of modern advertising. The commercial won acclaim, awards and the hearts of many gamers who saw ads like these as little signs that Sony knew who its audience were.

Chris Cunningham is another film-world darling who has been courted by Sony. His 'Mental Wealth' commercial pushed the PlayStation brand even further from those murky waters once occupied by men in monkey suits and bargain basement Schwarzeneggers. A piece to camera by an alien-looking girl called Fi-Fi (just a normal Scottish lass and a lot of special effects) was enough to get everyone talking. Sony learned there was no need to bash viewers' ears with promises or false enthusiasm – it was enough just to plant the seed.

With the launch of the PSP not far off, it will be interesting to see what TV and cinema spots Sony has in store for us. Last time round, with PS2, it was David Lynch. Maybe now we can expect something strange and new from a Wes Anderson or a Darren Aronofsky? Whatever the case, it most likely won't feature a roid-rage psychopath in spandex screaming "INCREDIBLE TWO-PLAYER SWORDS AND SORCERY ACTION!!!" into a pale child's trembling face.

lara croft: tomb raider

launch: 1996

developer: Eidos

need to know: Despite originally being a Saturn title, *Tomb Raider* epitomised PlayStation, with Lara the perfect character for gaming's new audience.

PLAYSTATION®?

working with gaming TV formats that need to have a far broader appeal.

"PlayStation was definitely the dividing line, the year zero, for games in the public consciousness," she says. "Before PlayStation, whenever I was called by TV and radio stations to go and talk about games, I'd always find myself having to explain the real basics to the person who'd phoned me – what is a console, what is a cart, that kind of thing. These common computer terms were as esoteric to the general public as common computer terms like 'ethernet' are now. After PlayStation, the people who called me up were far more savvy, and nowadays they definitely know what they're talking about. For some reason, PlayStation had made it onto the radar of the non-gamer."

Again, the traditional 'non-gamer' comes into play. Something had made them stop and pick up that little grey controller. Something in the PlayStation had given them an inkling of an understanding as to why long-time gamers had spent hours and hours in front of a TV. Was it really this 'magic' that we've been talking about? Or was it something far more basic?

"I had never touched a games machine until the PlayStation came out," says Richard Barry, a 47-year-old father of three from Guernsey. "But the first time I saw *Actua Soccer* I just had to have a go. This was the first time I'd seen games looking so real."

Reality. Perhaps, with the typical romanticism of gamers everywhere, we've been duped. Was the PlayStation magic simply a case of graphical prowess? Sony had understood that complex 3D graphics, processed quickly, created the formula for success, and Ken Kutaragi had produced the little console that could. Sega's Saturn, a beautiful machine in all other areas, failed on 3D and was made to look like a lemon.

PlayStation could throw reality at you with ease. The machine launched with a tech demo of a dinosaur, and you could manipulate it, rotate it and glory in the utter 3Dness and *real*ness of it. You want to see a manta ray? The same demo disc that brought you a dinosaur gave you a *manta ray* too. You could rotate it, make it swim, rotate it some more, and point out just how 3D and *real* it all looked. It might sound like nothing these days, but never have so many people been so enthralled by the slightly animated spinning adventures of a dinosaur and a fish.

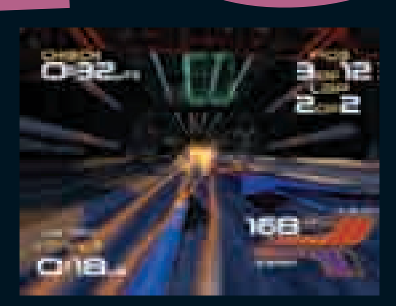
"THERE WERE PLAYSTATION ADS ON TV EVERY NIGHT, AND THEY WEREN'T COLOURFUL AND LOUD. THEY WERE DARK AND MOODY"

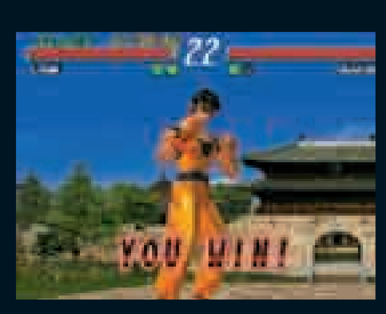
PlayStation's success is a catalogue of events that gamers might never have imagined. A 3D adventure game called *Tomb Raider* made a star of its main character. She wasn't an inclusive and beautifully designed avatar like Mario or Sonic the Hedgehog. She was a real looking lass with tits. A long-winded and very traditional Japanese RPG called *Final Fantasy VII* hit these shores, and for some reason, everyone and anyone became an RPG geek. Builders, lap dancers and scientists were wondering how best to breed their Chocobos, and grown men were reduced to tears by the death of some 3D graphics, processed quickly. There were PlayStation ads on TV every night, and they weren't colourful, loud and kid-friendly. They were dark, moody, occasionally controversial, and pieced together by some of the hottest up-and-coming directors in the industry.

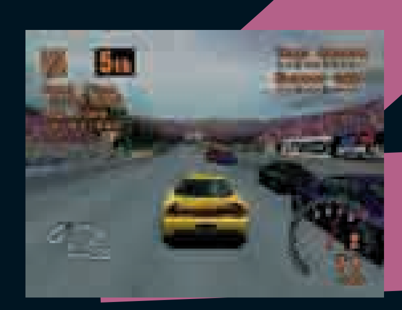
We had become a nation of gamers. The era of 'us and them' had begun.

"Although it was good to finally have my hobby acknowledged in the public consciousness, the downside was that you suddenly had all these people going on about average games as if they were great, simply on the basis that it was probably the first videogame they'd ever paid attention to," says Berlin. "I don't mean to sound snobby about that. It was great that more people were playing games, but what I hadn't counted on was that although games were now trendy, 'hardcore' gamers like me were still out on a limb, as the new breed of players seemed so naïve and undiscriminating — something not helped by Sony's policy of publishing anything that would extend PlayStation's library."

Visit any internet gaming forum these days and you'll find constant reference to the 'hardcore' and the 'casuals.' The 'hardcore' aren't just long-term gamers, those survivors of the pre-PlayStation era of social exclusion. The 'hardcore' are also a self-appointed elite. They, as they will so often remind you, are the 'true gamers'. The 'casuals', as defined by the hardcore, are those fools who fall









FROM FOOLS TO KINGS

The broad appeal of the PlayStation brand is such that there is a wealth of music programs available across PlayStation and PlayStation2. This is all well and good for fools like us who enjoying messing around, copying and pasting beats and loops in front of our TVs, but how do these music programs shape up for, well, a legitimate musical genius? Kevin Tihista is the Chicago-based singer/songwriter behind Kevin Tihista's Red Terror. His albums *Don't Breathe A Word* and *Judo* are considered modern classics, and his latest work, *Wake Up, Captain*, is already slaying the critics, and might very well be the album of the year. Who said **games**™ didn't hang with cool people? "I use the music-making programs for PS2 quite often. I have *Magix Music Maker*, *Ejay Clubworld* and *MTV Music Generator 1* and *2*," says Kevin. "All of the drums on *Come On Now* from my second record, *Judo*, are from *MTV Music Generator 2*, and I plan on using more of these little secret weapons in the future." We advise anyone who has ever used any console-based music program to take a listen to *Come On Now*. It will either inspire you, or make you shrink under its might. But what brings a traditional songwriter, someone with an eye on the integrity of the craft, to a music program on a games console? "My girlfriend and I have so many video games and so many consoles (including Atari 2600) that we could have our own shop. We really like the *Tony Hawk* series. She just kicked the crap out of *Tony Hawk's Underground*. My all-time favourite game has to be *Super Mario 3* – that's the one we always come back to." Fools, kings, music hobbyists and music craftsmen, it seems that the PlayStation has a little bit of something for everyone.

Crash Bandicoot

launch: 1996

developer: Sony

need to know: When PlayStation was launched Sony believed that it needed a mascot to compete with Mario and Sonic. Sadly, Crash wasn't much cop.

PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

for all the marketing hype and buy the same games as everyone else. The casuals are responsible for the success of *Tomb Raider*. The casuals are responsible for the success of the ever-present *FIFA* franchise. The casuals are responsible for everything that's wrong in the gaming world.

It's all nonsense, of course, but this constant 'us and them' is understandable. Gamers might not have been considered very highly from a social standpoint pre-PlayStation, but they were a community of people who felt like they were in the know. The PlayStation era killed that community dead. It was hard to see strangers stealing your baby. So, gamers had to further diversify in order to save their community. Importing boomed. There was a certain kudos attached to possessing the most bizarre and obscure Japanese games, regardless of their quality. The hardcore emerged from the swollen mass of popular gaming, and they held their copies of *Rakugaki Showtime* and *Silhouette Mirage* with pride. The trend continues even today, and an even stronger gaming community is the result.

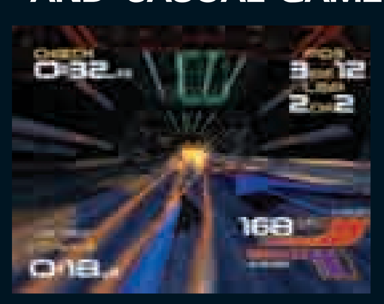
Be in no doubt. The PlayStation's influence and impact was earth-shattering.

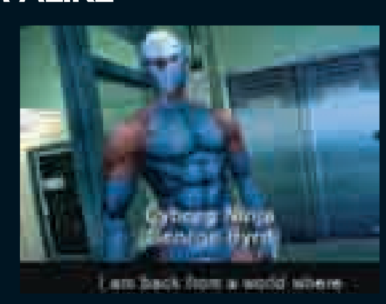
What, then, is in a name? Play and Station. Two words, with a non-space in between. Our celebration of the console is not just about that grey box with the pop-up lid, or about the great games that it gave us. It's about the world that the PlayStation left us with. Is it a better world? Many would argue that it isn't, but with fathers now playing games with their children on a nightly basis as a matter of course, it's difficult to argue that this era of acceptable gaming is anything less than a good thing.

PlayStation was also a doorway into the deeper, darker areas of gaming. It was the first step for many people on a journey that led them inevitably to an appreciation of other consoles, older consoles. A *Final Fantasy VII* nut may just have wanted to see what Squaresoft's old SNES titles shaped up like, and then found himself with a PC Engine and a Neo-Geo struggling for space under the TV.

The magic of the PlayStation is in its unifying appeal. PlayStation was, and is, a friend to the 'hardcore' and the 'casual' alike. These two groups may think themselves separate, but like Play and Station, there's no space in between.

"THE MAGIC OF THE PLAYSTATION IS IN ITS UNIFYING APPEAL. PLAYSTATION WAS, AND IS, A FRIEND TO THE 'HARDCORE' AND 'CASUAL' GAMER ALIKE"







PLAYSTATION: FROM LIFE, TO LIFE

Any writer will tell you that one of the earliest pieces of advice they will hear is 'Write what you know'. In the case of the PlayStation, it seems that Sony took a different path, but one that proved key to success – 'Give them what they know'. Jon Lenaway is the co-founder of American PR firm Step 3, and was responsible for various elements of the online marketing of the Xbox, not to mention titles such as *Halo* and *Project Gotham Racing*.

"Sony's done a great job bringing gaming to a more massive audience than systems had before it. It had finally given people more mainstream content that made it seem okay to be a gamer," he says. "A game like *Gran Turismo* let people drive their car, or *WipEout* made them feel like they were part of an electronica scene instead of just playing a racing game."

Sony was making it easy for people who had little gaming experience to 'tune in' to the products that were available for the PlayStation. The *Gran Turismo* push, focusing on that "real driving experience", made the title an easy sell – an admirable feat considering the depth, and some would say unfriendliness, of the game underneath. There was always something on the PlayStation shelf that any parent or grandmother with money in their pocket would understand. A driving game. A football game. A skateboarding game. Yes, a skateboarding game. When the *Tony Hawk* franchise began, there were very few kids on skateboards in this country. The surprise success of this fashionably themed game with deliciously old-school sensibilities brought us long summers watching mop-haired youngsters speeding around our city centres, performing dazzling feats they'd learned from a character in a videogame.

PlayStation courted the mainstream by giving them little slices of the world they knew. Safety, and lots of it. But the success of the PlayStation also afforded developers the luxury of opening gamers' eyes to little slices of the world they didn't quite understand. Kids became skateboarders after Tony Hawk, and started listening to The Ramones. Awkward guys started to dream that maybe, just maybe, they could dance a bit, after playing *Dance Dance Revolution*. And after playing one too many RPGs, normal human beings transformed into Japan-obsessed costume-fetishists with mad, staring eyes. You know the ones we mean.

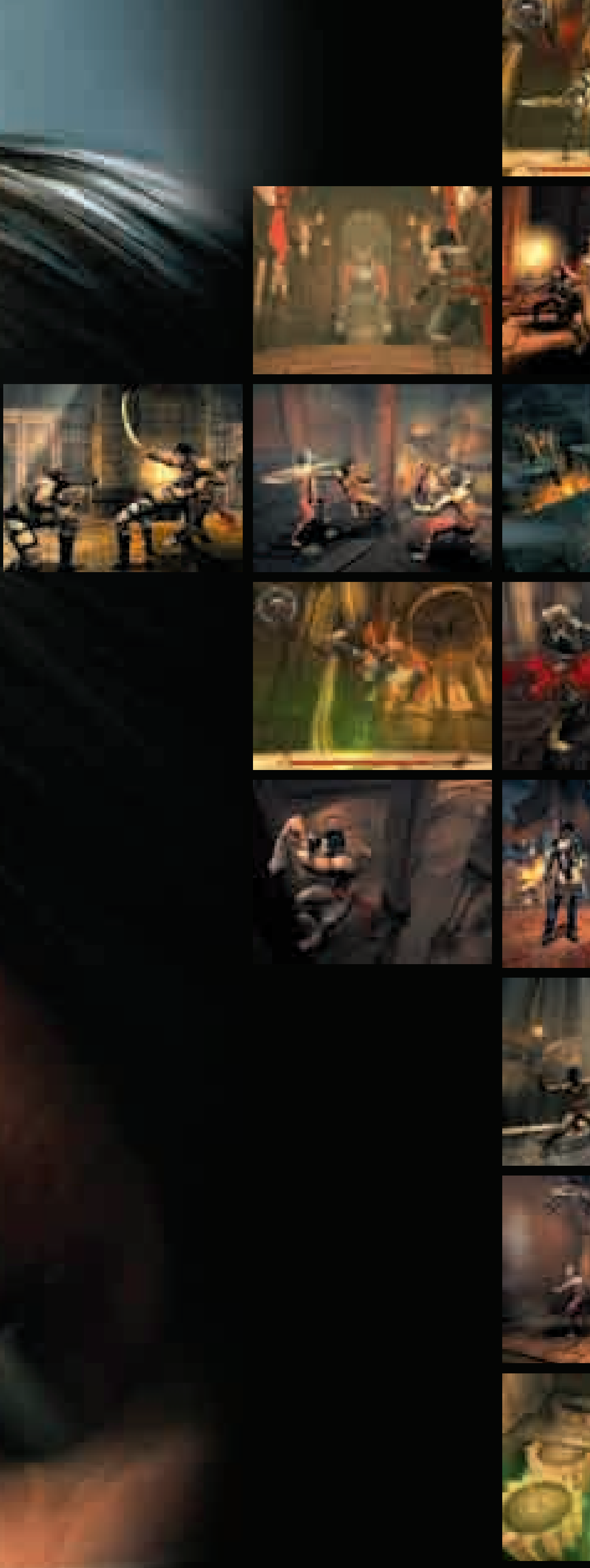
Metal Gear Solid: Solid Snake

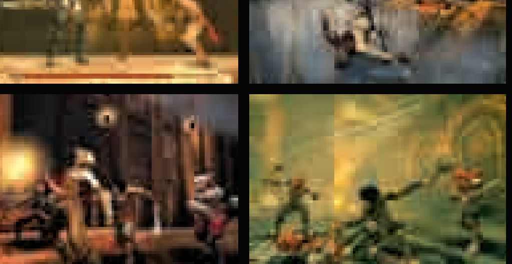
launch: 1998

developer: Konami

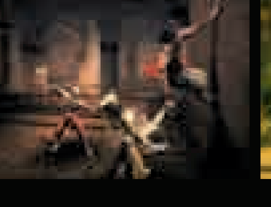
need to know: Adapted from the classic NES games, *Metal Gear Solid* was a massive hit for the PlayStation thanks to its introduction of stealth to the mainstream.







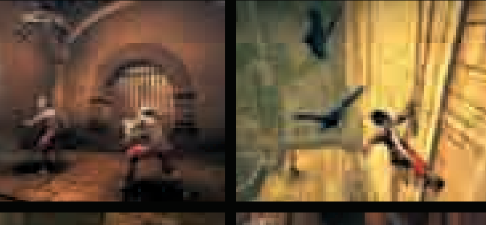




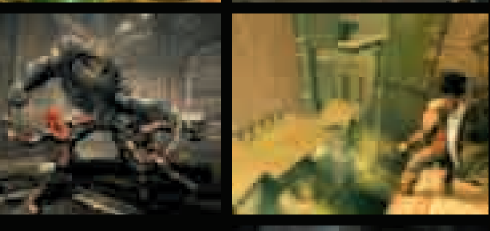


The years have not been kind to the Prince – in fact, they've been positively cruel. The Arabian knight is back to try to cheat fate once more…

REVIEWS









THE AVERAGE

Despite representing an industry in which high scores mean everything, games™ is not a magazine that marks with the majority. A lot of people think that anything below 7 (7.0, 70%, whatever) is a bad score – we don't. Going on a scale of one to ten, five is the average – average being a game that does what it sets out to do without attempting to do it better than anyone else. If a game gets five you'll get some enjoyment out of it but nothing more, simple as that. What's more, we won't be swayed by PR people telling us what a game's like – we only decide once we've played each game to death and, in the majority of cases, to completion. If a game's bad we'll make sure you know, if it's great we'll sing its praises. At the end of the day, we're just here to help you decide what's worth your hard-earned cash. After all, if it wasn't for you, we'd be out of a job.



The multiplayer is fun for a while, but you're likely to soon lose interest.



Just look at the size of these areas. It's going to take a lot of exploring to find all the power-ups that are hidden around the game.



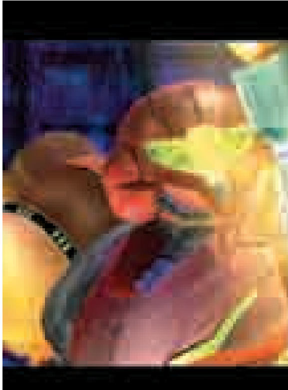
DEUS EX: IW



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS

METROID PRIME





IN SPACE NO ONE CAN HEAR YOU SCREAM… SCREAM… SCREAM…

METROID PRIME 2: ECHOES



When *Metroid Prime* was released for the GameCube back in early 2003 it was hailed as one of the most innovative titles to arrive on the platform since its launch. Even though there have been plenty of *Metroid* titles on other formats, this turned the series on its head. Shifting away from the traditional 2D adventure game, *Prime* became a form of FPS, the likes of which we had never seen before. Unlike a traditional FPS, *Prime* played like a 3D platformer with a first-person perspective and came complete with a set of controls that ideally suited this – and only this – kind of play. So impressed were we, in fact, that *Metroid Prime* scored the first ever perfect ten in **games™**. Naturally, we were fairly keen to play the sequel.

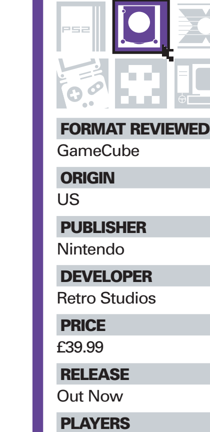
The story this time is a little different from the norm. After crash-landing on the planet Aether and finding a corpse-filled Federation ship, Samus is contacted by the planet's inhabitants and told that things aren't going too well. Surely not? But in a *Legend Of Zelda*-esque twist, Aether is co-existing in two dimensions: the Light and the Dark. Unfortunately, as bad luck would have it, the planet only has enough energy to support one of these worlds and the Dark version is winning the battle. Cue Samus and her heroic attempt to rescue an entire planet. Thanks to an unruly hoard of Ing (spider-like shadow monsters that inhabit the dark version of Aether) that attack you at the start of the game, you're left with a meagre selection of abilities and – much like the other *Metroid* titles – collecting them in order to progress through the story is what much of the game involves.

At first it may seem that little progress has been made since the last title. The look and feel of the game are identical (to start with, at least) and it's only after you've passed through the first area that you suddenly notice the vast changes that have been made. The whole game now revolves around the idea of Light and Dark, and to conquer each area you'll have to leap between the dimensions and complete tasks in both. Not really an original concept, admittedly, and although previously used in titles like *Legacy Of Kain: Defiance*, rather than fumbling around with the idea, Retro Studios has realised its potential and done it on a much larger scale. The Dark version of the planet is understandably more foreboding, with an atmosphere that continuously damages you while you're exposed. With this hindrance, the only way to travel though the Dark world is by running between small areas of light. This makes your journey through the Dark regions extremely tough and adds a puzzle element that you don't need to worry about while within the supposed safety of the Light planet.

"THE GAME NOW REVOLVES AROUND THE IDEA OF LIGHT AND DARK, AND TO CONQUER EACH AREA YOU'LL HAVE TO COMPLETE TASKS IN BOTH DIMENSIONS"

While they're in the Light areas, the Ing can possess any creatures they see fit, thus making already existing threats all the more powerful. Space Pirates aren't the most pleasant of creatures at the best of times; throw in some Dark-world beings to possess them and you're in serious trouble. To complement the two separate worlds and the opposing sides present, you'll also gain weapons to match. Light and Dark Beams will soon be at your disposal, each providing an effective attack method against foes aligned with the opposite force.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
US

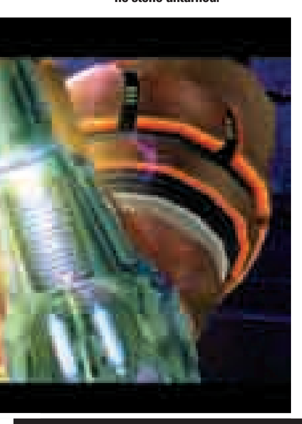
PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
Retro Studios

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4



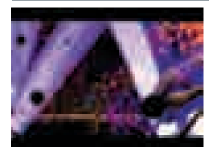
Without exploring you'll never receive the upgrades needed to complete the game. Leave no stone unturned.



24:00 TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

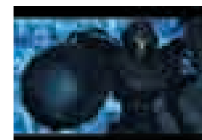
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

00:30 MINS



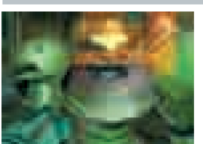
After plenty of scanning and a few minor scuffles you'll be attacked by an Ing hoard that will steal all your abilities and leave you for dead. Neighbourhood Watch informed.

04:00 HOURS



The moment you've been waiting for since you first laid eyes on Dark Samus – the showdown. You can't help feel that she'll be back for more, though.

3 DAYS



The story will have unravelled and you'll have a much better idea what's going on and the roles both you and Dark Samus are playing. We're not going to ruin that for you, though.

"THE METROID MULTIPLAYER EXPERIENCE THAT WE WERE LOOKING FORWARD TO IS MERELY A BONUS FEATURE THAT FEELS LIKE IT'S BEEN TACKED ON AS AN INCENTIVE RATHER THAN THE SUPER-EVENT WE WANTED"

The actual structure of the game has also changed. The areas are now much more defined and it's much easier to know where you're meant to be heading. Sure, backtracking and going over old terrain with new abilities is essential unless you want to be crushed by every Dark force you come across, but the feeling of hopelessness felt when faced with six sprawling maps and no clue as to where to go occurs much less frequently than it did in its predecessor and the game seems a little easier as a result. Something that made *Prime* so memorable was the scanning. Relentlessly flitting around, processing data on every object you can find like some kind of pathetic scan junkie, was an experience that some would rather forget – we thought it was great though, and it's back. Now the amount of scanning you achieve will affect not only your ending, but will unlock multiplayer maps as well. Oh yes, the multiplayer…

For all the praise and attention we may have given the main game, one area was always going to be scrutinised very closely. After being teased with split-screen shots for months and with the thoughts of some Samus-on-Samus action still firmly embedded in our minds, it was with great hope we attached the four controllers to our GameCube. We say hope, because ever since we first heard whisperings that *Echoes* was going to feature a multiplayer mode we had our doubts as to how well it would work. The control system in *Metroid Prime* – and what we knew to be the same set-up in *Echoes* – would simply never give the feeling of control needed in these situations. The ability to look up and down only when locked onto an enemy and, in fact, having a lock-on ability at all was surely going to make a mockery of what we all know and love as the deathmatch?

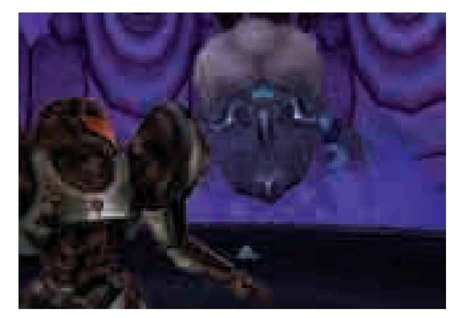
Sadly, we were spot on. As much as we tried we found it difficult to find any form of strategy

HEADS UP

As if Samus wasn't kitted up enough at the start of the game, there will also be two brand new visors for you to find. The Dark Visor will allow you to see enemies and objects that are cloaked with Dark powers (this is very similar to the Thermal Visor found in the last game), but it's the Echoes Visor that really steals the show. When visibility is proving a problem this will focus on sound waves in the immediate area and – with the help of some rather fancy visuals – locate enemies, switches and anything else that makes enough noise. Between these, the new suits that can be found and the return of her Screw Attack, Samus is handier than ever.



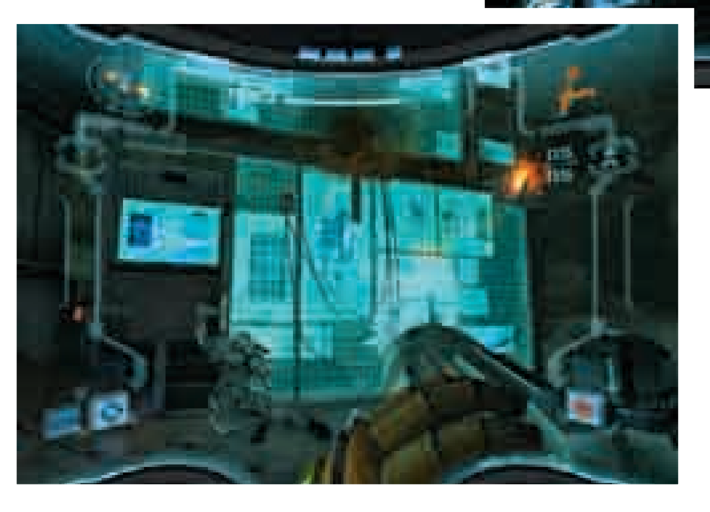
Certain bosses won't hesitate to use your own abilities against you.



As was the case in *Prime*, the bosses are no walkovers.

SOME INGS UP

When you lose your abilities at the start of the game, they are in fact absorbed by certain Ing warriors. Every so often while making your way around the Dark version of the planet you'll be faced with one of these skill-stealing shadow monsters and it'll use your own power against you to try to prevent you from taking it back. These enemies make for great mini-bosses and will really make you work for your extra skills. They are, of course, rock solid and much exploring is needed to find those hidden health power-ups you'll need so badly towards the end of the game. Best do so as you go – you don't want to have to go though it all again later now, do you?



ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

DARK MATTER: The new Light and Dark weapons make for more tactical and interesting battles.

READY TO RUMBLE: Although really nothing special, the multiplayer options are worth a play.

FAQs

Q. MORE SCANNING THEN?
Love it or hate it, near everything can be scanned and you'll need to do as much of it as possible.

Q. IMPRESSIVE BOSSES?
As you've come to expect from *Metroid* games, the bosses are large and in charge.

Q. IS RIDLEY BACK AGAIN?
Afraid not. We miss him too.

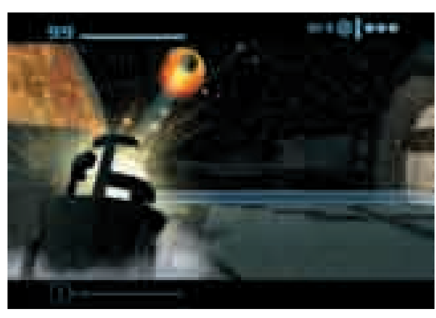
behind the matches, other than rolling around in ball form until you have adequate power-ups, then springing to life behind some poor Samus wannabe while they're occupied with another player. By the time your victim turns around to face you it's too late. They may have just enough time to see the nightmarish vision of you leaping around like an overactive chimp while you rain beams of light upon them, but thanks to the lock-on ability they have little chance of escape… unless they curl up into a ball and roll away, of course, when the whole sorry affair starts over again. The result? Four players constantly rolling or jumping, trying desperately to catch someone by surprise in order to fire off a few more shots. You never know, there's a chance that you might even get a kill if someone else has weakened them enough beforehand.

As a result, the whole *Metroid* multiplayer experience that we were so looking forward to is little more than a bonus feature that feels like it's been tacked on as an incentive rather than the copy-shifting super-event we were hoping for. With the main game being so strong the multiplayer mode really didn't need to be included, and with so many better multiplayer experiences to be had at the moment we really can't see the point of it.

As disappointing as this is, it can't take anything away from the meat of the title – the single-player campaign. All the style and playability of the first *Prime* title is still here, while the new weapons, suits and combat system provide enough of a new experience to enjoy it all over again. Fair enough, it doesn't evoke the same reaction this time around due to us having already seen much of what's on offer before, but that doesn't prevent it from being a damn fine game that should be played by all.



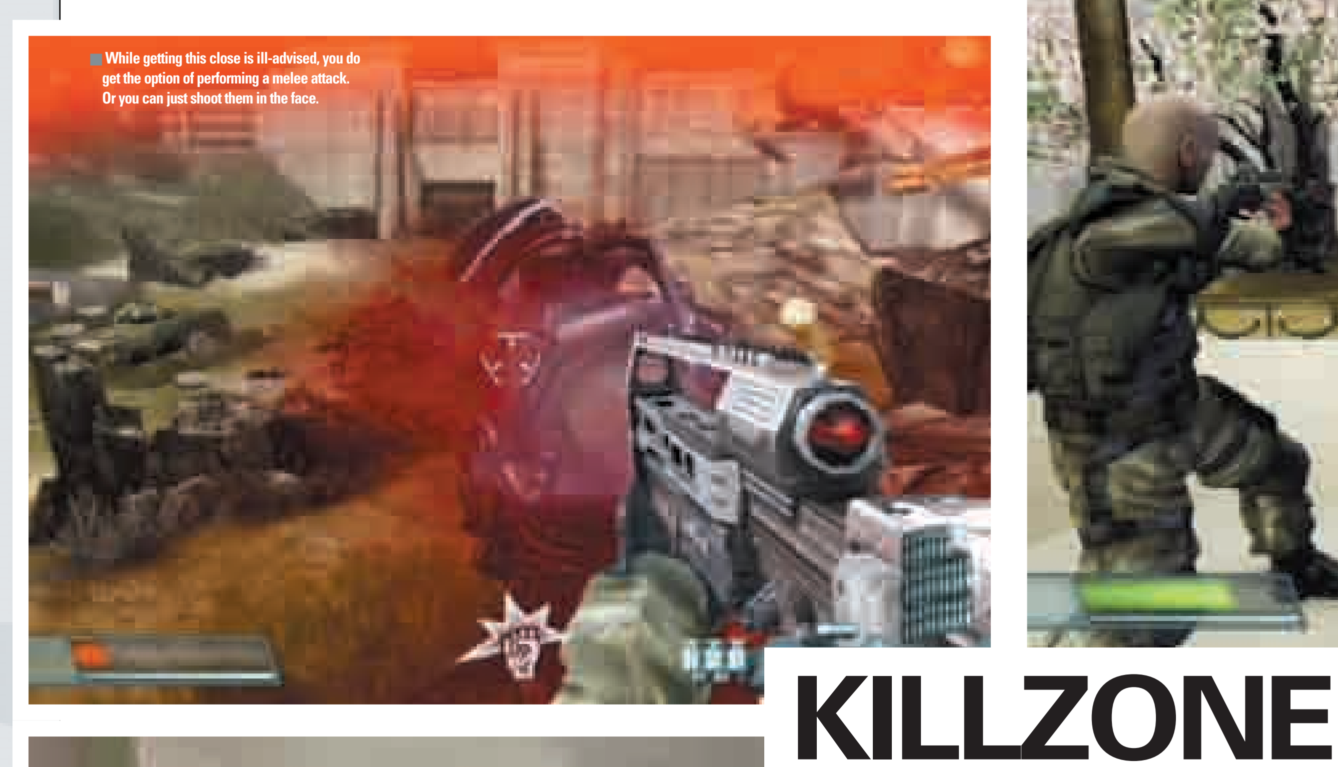
VERDICT 9/10
AS GOOD AS IT EVER WAS



These cannons play a large part in your search for the game's secrets.



When enemies are possessed by shadow their strength improves.



■ While getting this close is ill-advised, you do get the option of performing a melee attack. Or you can just shoot them in the face.

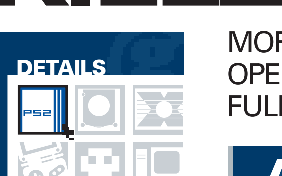




■ It's the little touches such as this dazzling gunfire that help form *Killzone*'s initial charm.

KILLZONE

DETAILS





FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Holland

PUBLISHER
Sony

DEVELOPER
Guerrilla

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-12 (Online)

MORE LIKE A CLEAN-UP OPERATION IN IRAQ THAN A FULL-SCALE WAR

A tenth birthday can be great. Your transition into double figures may have been marked with some jelly and ice cream. Perhaps a new bike. Maybe even a new console. So how has Sony chosen to dote upon its lucrative PlayStation brand on the tenth anniversary of the PSone's release? Pretty poorly, actually. This month the PlayStation2 has been lumbered with two over-hyped, under-performing duds – *The Getaway: Black Monday* and *Killzone*. That's like giving someone bath salts.

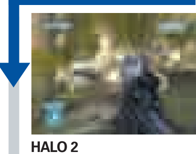
To be fair, *Killzone* is the lesser of two evils – at least it starts well. For all the disappointment that stems from this FPS – a game many were

RED FACTION II



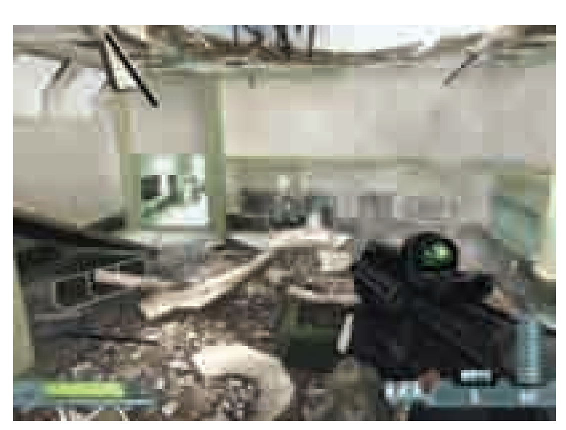
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



HALO 2







This makes a nice change from the usual 'dystopian space-ship' setting. Best blow it to pieces just in case.

games™ GLOBAL

TAKING GAMING ONLINE

HELL YEAH: When playing multiplayer, you get to play as the Helghast.

TORN: You and 12 others get to run around a variety of battle-scarred arenas.

expecting to go head-to-head with *Halo 2* – it is, initially, a genuinely fun and mesmerising experience. As you begin, you're thrust into a loud, dilapidated urban war zone. The opening movie showing the invading Helghast ruler whip his evil legions into a frenzy does a sterling job of readying you for war, ensuring you're suitably 'pumped' to enjoy the amazing visual dereliction around you. From the start, fellow soldiers are shouting at you, red-eyed Helghast are moving in and chaos is erupting everywhere. You're surrounded by a palpable sense of danger and first impressions are that this is going to be amazing.

As you progress through a network of trenches and smoke-filled landscapes, moments of calm and regrouping are interrupted by fellow soldiers' panic and the appearance of packs of enemy forces on the horizon. In your initiation stage where you're still a bit lost in the overwhelming sense of realism it's possible to feel genuinely uneasy when you see a gang of Helghast approaching as your fellow soldiers are dying around you. But this doesn't last. After throwing you in at the deep end without so much as a set of armbands, the game settles down. You get into a routine and become fairly confident and calm – the expertly crafted atmosphere of the opening level just doesn't carry through the game. It's a similar feeling to playing disaster-survival title *SOS: The Final Escape*, a game that starts memorably but gets bogged down by repetition and a failure to maintain the initial sense of awe.

The lack of consistency is down to *Killzone*'s tendency to gravitate towards boring, generic, indoor corridor levels instead of concentrating more effort on letting you loose in more visually striking open areas that give a better sense of the world you're fighting in. That said, outdoor levels further into the game are often as generic as their indoor counterparts. When the gameplay is typical FPS fare, a game that relies on exquisitely crafted scenery and atmosphere is going to lose a player's interest when this one point of interest disappears.

And the gameplay is typical. You simply progress through the stages shooting waves of Helghast soldiers, pick up a few new weapons, shoot some more and occasionally die because you've started thinking about something else while playing. Enemy AI does nothing to make the game interesting or complex – it's frequently possible to snipe one guard and have his friend remain in his position without any care for his immediate safety. Most of the time, unless a gun is loud and the Helghast can hear the fire they won't react – it's almost like they're unaware that bullets can be fired quietly from far away and simply assume their fellow soldiers are suffering narcolepsy whenever their collapse isn't accompanied by a loud bang.

As soon as the main game's initial awe has crumbled away, leaving a basic shooter, all that's left is the possibility of decent multiplayer action. Either alone versus bots or online against humans, you can set up one of many traditional arena-based games (Deathmatch, Assault, Domination) and run around shooting and collecting power-ups. The main problem here is that the game's wayward frame rate gives the impression of lag even in offline games. In addition, the arenas aren't particularly good and the engine ill-suited to this type of FPS play.

While *Killzone* is fairly satisfying, with suitably gung-ho action, there's never any variation, meaning what seems fun becomes wearisome after an hour or so. The ease with which the action unfolds makes the game easy to go back to for some quick blasting, even if a return to duty will be short-lived. Fans of war-torn shooters will find some enjoyment here, but hardened FPS aficionados demanding more content and consistency won't be so forgiving.

THREE'S COMPANY, FOUR'S A CROWD

Aside from the regular crew of consistently unhelpful fellow servicemen, you also team up with three other characters that formulate your team. You find these characters as you progress through the game and as they become available you have the option of ditching Templar, your default character, and playing as one of them. Luger, a female sniper, is your first choice, followed by Rico, a heavy character with a useful midi gun. The final character to unlock is the half-Helghast Hakha who simply uses the Helghast weapons you can pick up with the other characters anyway. Our character of choice is Rico. His big gun and firepower make him the only practical option.



Much of the game takes place in corridors such as this. And with Rico's big gun, opposing Helghast forces don't last too long.



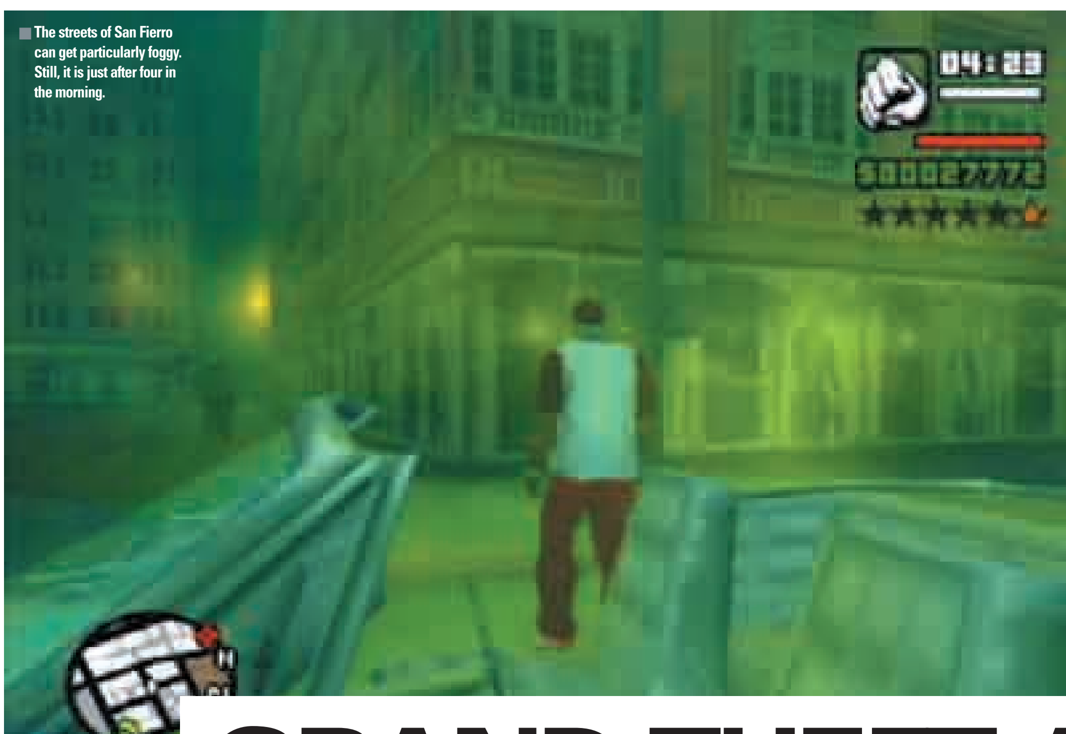
FAQs

Q. LIKE BEING THERE?
Almost – the atmosphere starts off amazingly thanks to excellent artistry and an abundance of noise. Shame it doesn't last.

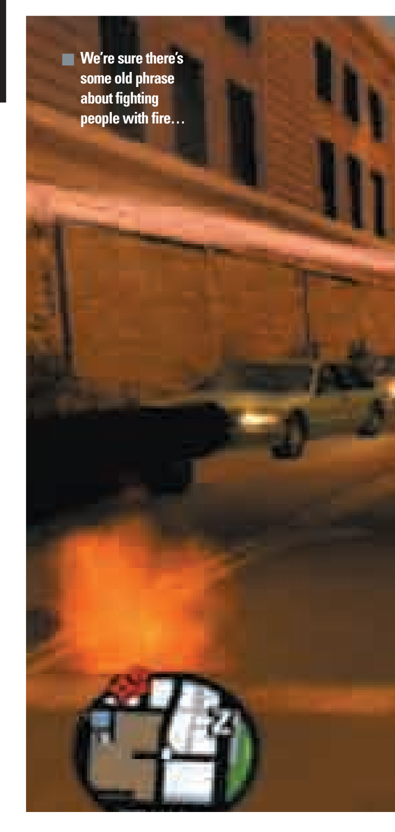
Q. THE PS2'S HALO?
Unfortunately not. While this is a decent game it's too linear and repetitive to be a leading FPS.

Q. DO THE CHARACTERS ADD VARIETY?
A little, although because Rico is so much more useful than the rest you'll probably only ever use him.

VERDICT 6/10
GOOD BUT DISAPPOINTINGLY UNDER-REALISED



The streets of San Fierro can get particularly foggy. Still, it is just after four in the morning.


We're sure there's some old phrase about fighting people with fire…

GRAND THEFT AUTO:



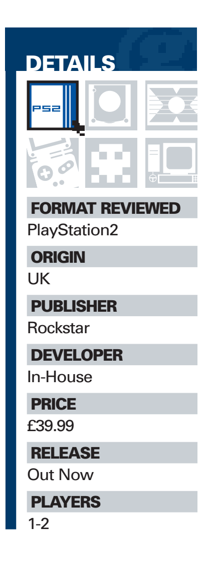


GUNS DON'T KILL PEOPLE, GANGSTAS DO

Where do you begin when attempting to review a game like *San Andreas*? A game so massive that it often overwhelms with its sheer potential; a game so varied that it renders entire genres obsolete; a game imbued with such freedom that it makes *Fable* and *The Sims* look like *Tempest* and *Operation Wolf* by comparison. It doesn't take a genius to recognise that *San Andreas* is far more than the sum of its many parts and so pulling apart any one is futile – even a slightly fluctuating frame rate and the glitches and pop-up that were in the last two games (albeit to a lesser extent here) can't detract from the enjoyment, the experience and the atmosphere. This is *Wayne's World*. This is *Faith No More*. This is *Super Mario World*. This is, more topically, *Boyz N The Hood*. This is everything that's good about the early Nineties, crammed onto a single DVD. Now go ruin someone's day.

As it did previously with *Vice City*'s day-glo environments, Rockstar has absolutely nailed the game's setting, both geographically and culturally. The three main cities are impressive takes on their real-world bases and everything from radio stations to fashions are ten years out of date, exactly as intended. You'll while away hours shopping in Victim and filling your belly at one of San Andreas' many knowingly named eateries before taking in the sights – a trip to see the World's Largest Cock comes highly recommended. Even with a map so

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Rockstar

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2



FAQs

Q. HOW BIG IS IT?
The main story mode will set you back 50-odd hours; more if you take in the sights, which you invariably will.

Q. CAN I STEAL PLANES?
Planes, boats, cars, trains, pushbikes, mowers, combine harvesters, helicopters… if it moves, you can jack it.

Q. WHAT ABOUT CJ?
Dress him up, get him inked and style him before taking him out on the town to meet ladies or throw some crazy gang signs.

gamesTM

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

ON TARGET: Locking onto enemies has never been easier – pop those caps in asses…

FREEDOM: So much to do and all the time in the world to do it. San Andreas is your oyster.



The Apache is the best bringer of death from above in *San Andreas*.

ESCAPE FROM LS

Anyone who's played either of the previous *GTA* titles this generation will no doubt know of the 'clever' ways in which players are restricted to a small portion of the map – roadblocks, broken bridges, hazardous weather conditions and so on. Unsurprisingly, then, CJ is blocked from leaving Los Santos until certain feats have been accomplished. But while it may seem that CJ's ability to swim renders such blockades pointless, make a break for the banks of Las Venturas and no sooner will you have touched dry land than a king's ransom will be out on your head. Every local law enforcement agent will try to use your arrest or assassination to leap up the career ladder. Oh, and don't even think about visiting the Pay & Spray. All shops are closed until you legitimately 'unlock' an area. The cheeky swines…

SAN ANDREAS

huge, there are few streets that fail to convey the attention to detail that Rockstar has ploughed into creating a world as enjoyable to rampage around as it is 'believable' in its own tongue-in-cheek way. People go about their business, police are seen in hot pursuit of crooks, and passers-by will wisecrack about CJ's looks or size, to which you can even respond with a tap of the D-pad. This really is the most believable city ever realised in a videogame.

The progression is much the same as it always has been, stringing together increasingly elaborate and illegal ploys as CJ rises from ne'er-do-well to criminal overlord. While the story may be interesting enough to keep you playing, it feels more like the wonderfully realised society is what's holding your attention. Better still, Rockstar has paid heed to criticism of the last games, reworking the camera and targeting systems so that both are now simple and effective. Stealth kills are a nice addition (even if the dedicated sneaking sections remind us of *Manhunt*) and the range of weaponry and vehicles is incredible. You can even up your stats in various areas – a bicycle cruise will boost cycling skill and stamina; training at the gym makes you lose weight and gain muscle; even driving and flying abilities are augmented over time. This gives you more things to juggle and much more freedom to play the game you want to play.

As has always been the case, the game's seemingly limitless freedom is what throws up the most potential for mischief. Once the opening missions are over, the training wheels come off and the first quarter of the map is yours to explore. Whether you want to earn money as a taxi driver, search for rival tags to spray over, throw vehicles off cliffs, build up your stats or just murder a few innocents in cold blood, your legacy will be as twisted, as exciting or as brutal as your imagination will allow. Improving on the spread of activities from the last few games (or indeed any other title you may care to mention), CJ is able to commit burglaries at night, perform parachute jumps, go on two-player rampages and enjoy a little courting should he find a suitable lady.

But where *San Andreas* succeeds best is the way it touches so many different people on so many different levels. While we've been happy to crack on with loads of missions (stopping now and then for a spot of car-jacking or similar tomfoolery), others about the office have yet to even return home after the intro sequence, preferring to see for themselves just how much can be achieved before the game proper even begins. Whatever your poison, it's tough not to find ways to enjoy your time in San Andreas – as much as people may pick holes in the pop-up and glitching, this represents a staggering achievement on the four-year-old console and raises the bar substantially in terms of scale, potential and, indeed, sandbox gaming in general. For fear of sounding pretentious or contrived, *San Andreas* is an experience as unique as you are. Sometimes, it's okay to believe the hype…



Ladies and gentlemen, the World's Largest Cock in all its glory. Rockstar clearly thought long and hard about what landmarks to include…

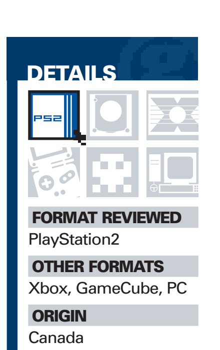




PRINCE OF PERSIA? PRINCE OF DARKNESS, MORE LIKE

PRINCE OF PERSIA: WARRIOR WITHIN

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, GameCube, PC

ORIGIN
Canada

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DEVELOPER
Ubisoft Montreal

PRICE
£39.99

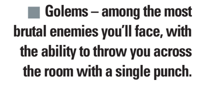
RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

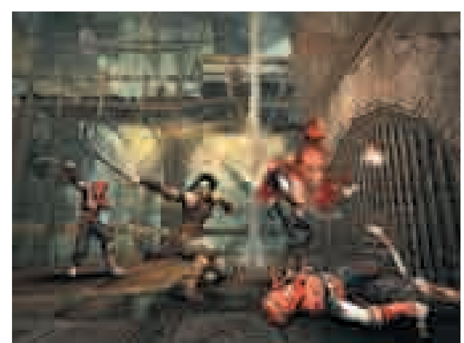
Happy endings are all very well, but for us it's what might take place afterwards that's much more interesting; those unspoken events where anything could happen, depending on how you read between the lines. Take the Prince of Persia following the events of *Sands Of Time*, for instance: he's killed the evil Vizier, prevented Farah's death, restored the Sands of Time and escaped to fight another day… right? Well, no. And that's the beauty of *Warrior Within*, the Prince's second adventure under the watchful eyes of Ubisoft. Whereas *Sands Of Time* led us through an elegant fairy tale, the sequel tosses us headlong into a fully fledged nightmare.

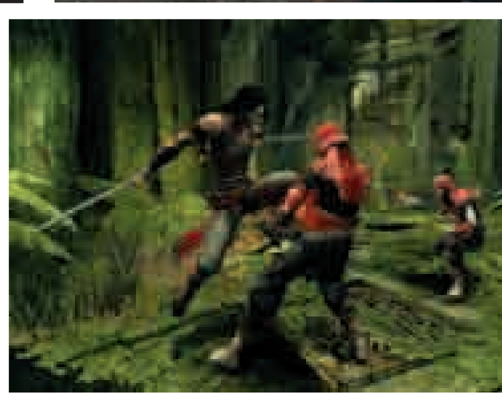
It's now several years since his last adventure and we discover that things haven't been going well for the Prince, what with being hunted by an unstoppable evil and all. The problem is, fate doesn't like being messed with and since the Prince managed to avoid an untimely death at the hands (or rather, grains) of the Sands of Time, he's now marked for death by fate itself; or more specifically, the ancient Persian god of death known as the Dahaka. For those of you who enjoyed *Sands Of Time* it's an intriguing concept before you even begin, but this hook has allowed Ubisoft to fashion an all-round darker and more malevolent setting for *Warrior Within*. The Prince, five years older and wiser, is a battle-beaten swordsman with his own survival, rather than that of anyone else, at heart; his enemies, born out of shadows, display a brutal ferocity beyond that of his previous foes; his environment is a dilapidated fortress filled with both beauty and ruin. That Ubisoft has managed to convey all this through the game's intricately detailed visuals alone (even before the story unfolds) is a huge achievement, although the beautiful graphics, full of texture and grittiness, certainly aren't the biggest improvement that *Warrior Within* makes over its predecessor.

The major changes have been reserved for the game's combat, which is by turns staggeringly complex and incredibly user-friendly. Having seen the whole system of chains and combos laid out for us like some complex molecular diagram, the number of possibilities open to the player is double that of *Sands Of Time* thanks to the Prince's new ability to wield two weapons at once. However, the mechanics have also been tightened significantly, placing specific emphasis on timing and skill rather than haphazard button mashing. With the new enemy AI now more than happy to try attacking two, three or even four at a time, mastery of

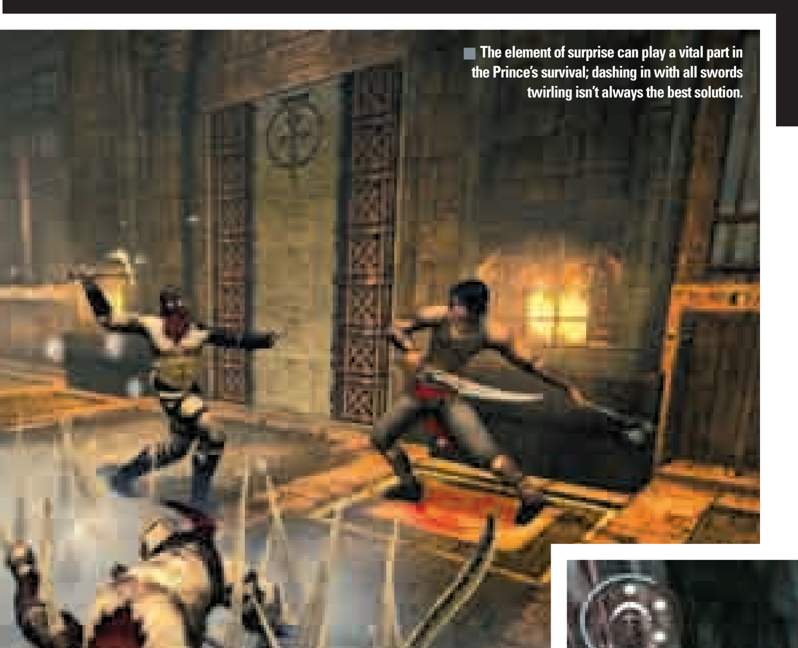

Golems – among the most brutal enemies you'll face, with the ability to throw you across the room with a single punch.

Stringing combos to kill multiple enemies is instinctive.

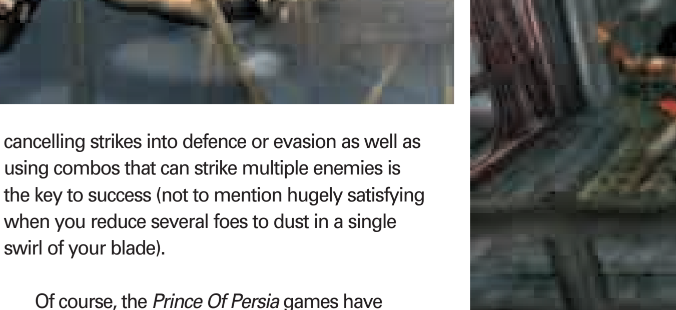








The element of surprise can play a vital part in the Prince's survival; dashing in with all swords twirling isn't always the best solution.



RENOVATION – THAT'S WHAT YOU NEED

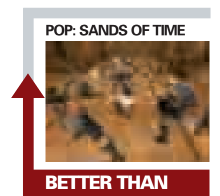
The big catch in *Warrior Within* is that there are actually two fortresses on the Island of Time – a ruined one in the present and a fully restored one in the past. By using the various portals found within the fortress the Prince can leap back and forth in time in order to explore the fortress in different periods, although each version has its own share of obstacles. Collapsed chambers ravaged by time in the present will be pristine in the past, while young flourishing gardens in the past are horribly overgrown in the present; how you negotiate each one in order to reach your destination is where most of the challenge lies.

cancelling strikes into defence or evasion as well as using combos that can strike multiple enemies is the key to success (not to mention hugely satisfying when you reduce several foes to dust in a single swirl of your blade).

Of course, the *Prince Of Persia* games have always been about a satisfying sense of achievement, that ability to string together acrobatic moves that allow you to reach your goal stylishly and safely, and it's this that Ubisoft has taken even further with *Warrior Within*'s level design. As before, there are plenty of moments where walking into an area creates confusion over where to go next, although the removal of *Sands Of Time*'s visions increases the challenge; immediately panning the camera round looking for that elusive ledge or pole to leap off soon becomes instinctive. Compared to the last game's geometrically sound layouts, *Warrior Within* is more devious, forcing you to experiment with possible methods of progress before hastily erasing your mistakes with the Prince's reinstated Recall power. What's more, he now has abilities such as grabbing ropes to extend how far he can wall-run, or using his dagger to slide down banners Sinbad-style; they're minor skills, but enough to add extra complexity to the game's already well-stocked puzzle mechanics.

That said, *Warrior Within* as a whole is far more than Ubisoft taking the easy way out and simply adding a handful of extras to its earlier effort. Instead, you get the impression that *Sands Of Time* was just a warm-up for the main event, a game that's familiar at first but soon reveals a level of imagination beyond that of the original, and displays as little room for error as one of the Prince's most daringly acrobatic leaps.

POP: SANDS OF TIME



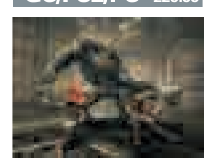
BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



BEING SINBAD

GC/PS2/PC £29.99



All the versions are relatively close to one another besides the usual suspects – specifically, slight graphical loss and longer loading for PS2, and the need of a pad for PC gamers.

FAQs

Q. DIFFICULT?
Oh yes. Far more challenging than the last game, though it's never unfair.

Q. COMPLEX COMBAT?
The move list is a little overwhelming at first, but it offers far more flexibility when taking on hordes of enemies at a time.

Q. CONFUSING?
Perhaps the game's only failing; because you can go anywhere you want at any time, it can sometimes be hard to see where to go once you've completed an objective.



Compared to the original game's single palace, *Warrior Within*'s sprawling fortress offers a wide variety of environments.

games™

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

DARK AGE: *Warrior Within* is darker and meaner than *Sands Of Time*, with a different kind of charm.

TWICE AS NICE: Two fortresses, one in the present and one in the past, offer unique challenges.



VERDICT 9/10

REFINES THE GENIUS OF THE ORIGINAL IN EVERY WAY

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DEVELOPER
Red Storm Entertainment

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4 (1-16 Online)

GHOST RECON

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

RAINBOW SIX 3: BLACK ARROW

GHOST RECON 2

TOM CLANCY'S GHOSTS AS YOU'VE NEVER SEEN THEM BEFORE

With war-based squad titles in vogue, it's Red Storm Entertainment's turn to step up to the plate and try to improve on the gung-ho bravado gameplay of *Rainbow Six 3*. If you're a fan of the original game and expansion packs, though, you may be left rather nonplussed by *Ghost Recon*'s new direction…

The first level is a baptism of fire with your Ghosts thrown into what's technically known as a shitstorm. Shells bombard the North Korean airfield you're trying to capture, attack helicopters need to be blasted from the sky and you have to try to stem the tide of a never-ending sea of infantry. If the original *Ghost Recon* was the equivalent of a gentle caress from a loved one, its sequel feels like a hefty kick in the balls. Indeed, the sheer ferocity of the first level is incredibly infuriating and could put off all but the most hardened players. Although subsequent stages are easier – thanks (but no thanks) to the poor decision to implement a quick-save option – the difficulty level continues to spike in a worryingly haphazard fashion for the rest of the game.

This is a real shame as so much effort has been made to improve the series for the console market. Instead of switching between men like in *Ghost Recon*, the sequel sees you control a squad à la *Rainbow Six 3*. Pointing your sight in the desired direction and pressing a button sees your men destroying enemy vehicles, laying down cover for you, and even healing each other. It's a wonderfully fluid system that, while slightly clunkier than *Rainbow Six 3*'s, is a world away from the cumbersome controls of the original. Alternatively, you can go it alone as a



Lone Wolf with state-of-the-art weaponry and an even more ridiculous difficulty curve. And visually the game has seen a dramatic improvement – the fog that was so problematic in the original Xbox titles has gone.

games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
LOOK SHARP: The visuals have been greatly improved – that troublesome fog has cleared now.
NEW LOOK: A new third-person perspective complements the original first-person viewpoint.

Unsurprisingly, the multiplayer modes are a significant part of the game, and while they're not a patch on *Rainbow Six 3*, they're a drastic improvement and offer some surprisingly tense battles. Despite all the enhancements, though, *Ghost Recon 2* is still in a tricky situation – its lack of accessibility will annoy *Rainbow Six 3* die-hards, while the new direction will leave fans of the original feeling rather cold.

VERDICT 6/10
A BRAVE SEQUEL THAT TRIES A LITTLE TOO HARD

PS2 £39.99



PS2 owners are treated to a totally different version of the game that's much more arcadey than its Xbox peer and is also a damn sight easier to boot. It doesn't match the Xbox in the aesthetics department, but this is still a worthwhile title.



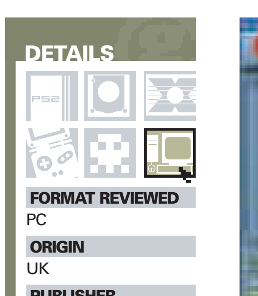
It's a breeze to switch between weapons, so a rocket launcher is never more than a button-press away.



Considering how little of your body is shown, you're oddly easy to hit.


eMag

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Sega

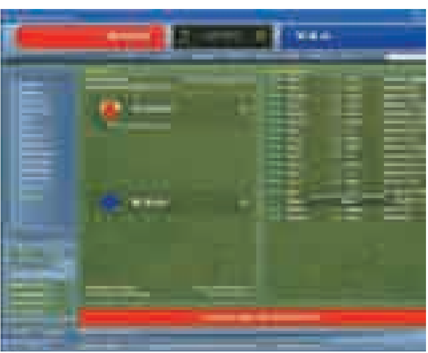
DEVELOPER
Sports Interactive

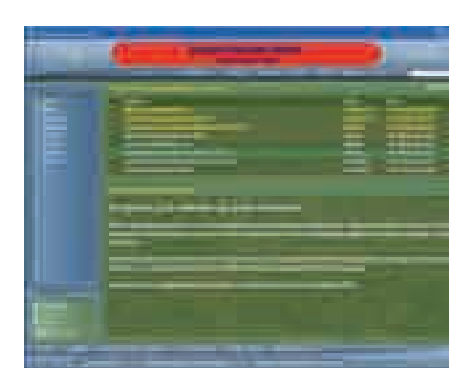
PRICE
£29.99

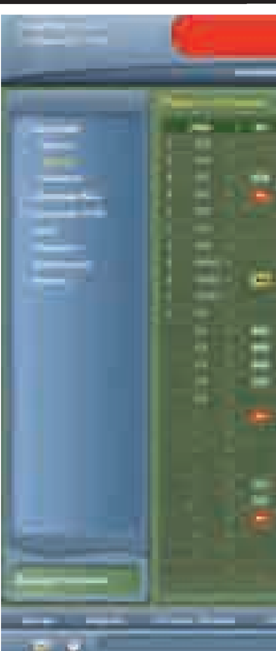
RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

MINIMUM SPEC
Pentium 4 1.8GHz processor, 256Mb system RAM, 8x CD-ROM drive







Tactical options have been refined and improved for SI's first outing with Sega.

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005

THE SPIRITUAL SUCCESSOR TO CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER IS THE FIRST OUT OF THE BLOCKS

Ever since Sports Interactive and Eidos announced they were parting company, armchair football managers have been holding their breath to see where each company would take the genre next. *Championship Manager* has been doing all the talking so far. The usual big marketing budget has seen sponsorship of Sky One's *The Match* and high public awareness of Eidos' effort, but the news from within the company is not good; a poor showing at Game Stars Live has now been augmented by a delay until 2005 for *Championship Manager 5*, meaning valuable ground has been lost before a ball has even been kicked. Sports Interactive, on the other hand, appears to have kept its head down and concentrated purely on the game itself. Not for this team the grand posturing; the company seems to have invested all its time and effort into making the game and then doing the marketing. And it seems to have paid off.

Put simply, *Football Manager 2005* is the best football management game Sports Interactive has produced to date, and will cost football fans just as many hours as its predecessors in the *Championship Manager* series. God is in the details and, as always, SI has pulled out all the stops to ensure that the virtual world of *Football Manager* is deeper and more believable than in any other sports management title. To begin with, there are more playable countries than ever before, from the English Premiership to the Indian Championship. The game also goes deeper than *Championship Manager* did, with the chance to take charge of teams from, say, the Conference North and South in England. Ever fancied taking Weymouth to Premiership glory? Now you can.

Many players now have photographs included as part of their profiles too, which, odd as it may sound, makes the game feel much deeper. Yes, everyone knows what Michael Owen looks like, but take over a side in the lower leagues and having an actual image of what Joe Bloggs the full-back looks like draws the player even deeper into an imaginary world. The match engine has also been refined and improved so that players react in a much more realistic way. One of the most frustrating things about *Championship Manager 4*'s match engine was the way defenders would often lash the ball behind for a corner despite being under little or no pressure to do so. In *Football Manager*, better players will remain calm under pressure rather than panicking (with the possible exception of Phil Neville) and this makes match days much less stressful.

Fancy undertaking a season as Weymouth?



FAQs

Q. IS IT POSSIBLE TO PLAY THE GAME ONLINE?
Although not really designed as an online game, it is possible to play a league over the net or a LAN. It'll take a while, though…

Q. WILL GENERATED PLAYERS HAVE PHOTOGRAPHS TOO?
SI ran a competition where fans were invited to send in pictures of themselves. These photos will be used to represent new players in the future.

Q. CAN YOU PLAY AS AN INTERNATIONAL MANAGER FROM THE START?
Yes, this option will be available immediately for those who want to test themselves against the best.

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

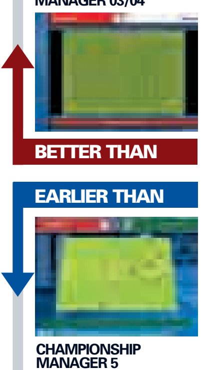
MEDIA INTERACTION: Slag off other managers in the press and watch the fireworks.

SHEER SIZE: From Bolton to Bombay, the world's football teams are here to play with.

The big names like Michael Owen are there if you have the cash…

BLOODY FOREIGNERS

One touch that will please would-be international managers is the customisable database. If you only want to run one country's leagues but think you may want to manage a different nation internationally, then you can choose to import all of that nation's players at the start of your game. Then, when the player comes to manage that side, they will have a full complement of players to choose from. This is something that will be of great benefit to managers who don't have a great deal of RAM to run leagues simultaneously.



Perhaps the biggest addition to the game over the elements that were included in *Champ Manager* is increased interaction with the media. Managers will now be chatting regularly to the press about their chances in upcoming matches, as well as voicing their opinions of fellow managers. This opens up the chance to begin long-running feuds with fellow championship contenders, firing up the player's team in the process. Everyone knows that the hatred between Wenger and Ferguson adds something extra when Arsenal meet Manchester United, and now it's possible for *Football Manager* players to make footballing enemies (and friends) of their own. Suggesting that your forthcoming opponents 'have to win' your top-of-the-table clash could heap extra pressure on their playing staff – then again, it could result in your own players getting cocky and slipping up.

Elsewhere, it is very much a case of improving on lots of small elements to create a game that is better in every way. Those who like to head off into the smaller nations around the world and ply their trade will no doubt be grateful for the 'rules' menu that accompanies each league, informing would-be managers of any transfer restrictions, how many European places are up for grabs and suchlike. Another welcome inclusion is the fact that the front end doesn't have to be locked for *Football Manager* to process other results. Although it will run quicker if the front end is locked, you can have results processing in the background while the manager scouts for players and so on.

However, *Football Manager* is much more than the sum of its many parts. Games like this succeed because they suck the player into a virtual world of their own creation and never let them go. *Football Manager* does so in spectacular style. The gauntlet has been thrown down triumphantly, and only time will tell if *Championship Manager* will be able to compete. One thing's for certain, though – it will need to be bloody good to even stand a chance.

VERDICT 9/10

WHO NEEDS THE CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER NAME?

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Sony

DEVELOPER
Insomniac

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4 (1-8 Online)

RATCHET & CLANK 2
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN
PRINCE OF PERSIA

There are all sorts of obscure sub-games shoehorned into the adventure. This one's a 2D platformer.

NOT QUITE TIME TO BURY THE RATCHET

RATCHET & CLANK 3

games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

BOOMSTICKS: No series does stupid weaponry quite like *Ratchet & Clank*, and this title ups the bar.

LIGHT RELIEF: There are dozens of sub-games. We recommend the 2D *Captain Qwark* platformer.

As a rapidly developing licence, the *Ratchet & Clank* series should be commended for having such heady ambition and character. In fact, if the series survives the generation jump then we reckon PS3's *Ratchet* games will be something like *Elite* with free-roaming platform-shooter planets. But for now, this is a surprisingly solid and enjoyable sequel with some of the most striking visuals yet to grace a PS2 and a complete absence of loading screens. Well, the last point's not strictly true, but the developer has hidden the loading behind space-travel cut-scenes, holding the action together seamlessly. It's a touch that highlights just how well polished the *Ratchet 3* package is, running like a fast-paced hybrid of an Eighties cartoon and an old-fashioned platform-shooter.

It might be derivative in many ways, but there's a certain charm to the low-rent *Futurama* antics of the *Ratchet & Clank* universe: it knows its audience and panders to it without shame, scooping up a disparate medley of platforming/shooting tasks and weaving them all into a quietly epic narrative framework. Vast, sprawling adventure? Check. Referential, tongue-in-cheek humour? Check. Cavalcade of likeable, zany characters? Check. In fact, many adult gamers will find themselves trying to hide exactly how much they connect with this inoffensive kiddie-fodder, especially since there is a wealth of baby-boomer humour hidden under the surface.

The most surprising element of *Ratchet 3*, however, is how well it plays, with countless exploding baddies clogging the screen without a hint of slowdown. The learning curve, too, is more progressive this time around, though the sheer volume of enemies means a reliance on new, frighteningly unfamiliar techno-weaponry is vital. Thankfully, Insomniac has included an inventive array of gadgets, each with several levels of automatic upgrade. It's all a pleasant surprise, and we'd offer Sony's title the full thumbs-up were it not for the often exasperating camera. It doesn't make the game unplayable, but it frustrates enough to throw down the pad at times. Charm can only get you so far…



As ever, *Ratchet's* worlds are filled with beautiful designs set in varied environments.

VERDICT 7/10

SURPRISINGLY GOOD, BUT NOT WITHOUT ITS FLAWS

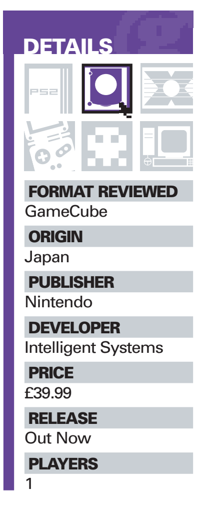




Ratchet's upgrades aren't just weapon-based – this gun acts a bit like a hookshot.


eMag





DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
Intelligent Systems

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

Déjà vu. Probably not the most auspicious sensation when picking up the second sprawling action RPG to hit the GameCube in as many weeks (*Tales Of Symphonia* being the other), but it's a feeling we suspect fans of the original *Paper Mario* on the N64 will have when starting up its sequel. The turn-based combat, the 2D styling, the partners to bolster Mario's abilities… going on initial impressions, *Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door* may as well be the same game on a different console. But then the same could be said for many Nintendo titles; it's only once you've explored them fully that they reveal new and improved depths.

Not surprisingly, then, the Cube imagining of *Paper Mario* is different from its predecessor, not just because of the new world to explore but

PAPER MARIO: THE THOUSAND YEAR DOOR

AN ADVENTURE THAT'S ONLY PAPER-THIN ON THE OUTSIDE



It's essential to fill up the Tattle Log by examining each enemy before battle, thus building up a catalogue of their strengths and weaknesses.

games™ **ENHANCED**

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

TIME TO DUEL: The combat system now includes elements that can help and hamper the player.

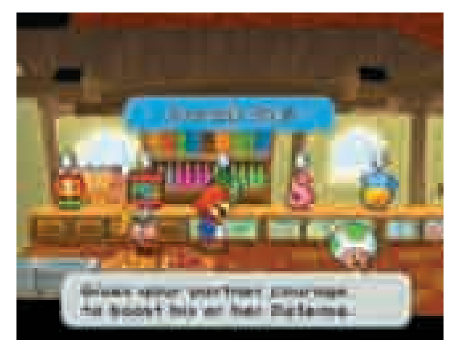
PAPER BEATS STONE: *Paper Mario*'s 2D style is even more integral to the game's logic than before.

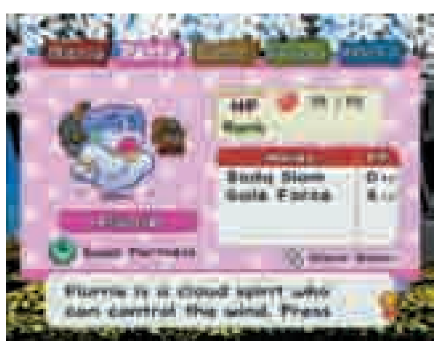


For some reason, Mario appears to have become something of a sex symbol – all the females in the game find him incredibly attractive. Though that's not to say all those characters here are female – those bushy moustaches have a curiously wide appeal…

also thanks to the enhancement of the key concepts. Some things, however, never change – Princess Peach has been kidnapped again (although this time it's by the rather nasty X-Nauts), Bowser's still on the rampage (mainly because someone other than him has taken Peach) and Mario's the only person who can save the day. Again. Combine all that with an attempt by Nintendo to squeeze elements of almost all the other Mario games into one adventure and you've got a game that feels both incredibly familiar and refreshingly new in equal quantities.

Being a fully fledged RPG rather than a platform-based adventure *Thousand Year Door* does require some adjustment by those not familiar with the style. While the main adventuring segments are fairly self-explanatory (players guide Mario and his partners around various regions, talking to other characters, hitting blocks and solving puzzles), the game demands a little more thought than just jumping on switches and dropping down Warp Pipes. Your partners, for instance, play a key role in your progress thanks to their unique skills – Koops the Koopa Trooper can grab items from a distance or activate switches when a second pair of hands is needed; cloud-formed Flurrie can blow away peeling paper and reveal hidden passages; new-born Yoshi can hover over small gaps and so on. Although you can


Survival is item-based, so you'll have to visit the game's many shops.


Each partner can be 'upgraded' by trading in Shine Sprites.


A Puni Orb? It looks quite a good size to us. Sorry…


Special moves in combat require both timing and skill to succeed – some, like the Hammer, are simple but they get trickier later on.

switch between partners at will once they've joined your team, the skill lies in knowing when to use them. There are several dead ends that can be returned to and passed once you've gained a new partner, all of which provide the sense of satisfaction that comes with such progress.

Presented as it is on virtual paper, the graphical style also offers its own range of challenges for Mario to overcome and the abilities with which to do it. Thinking in 2.5D isn't as easy as it sounds, although it soon becomes second nature – checking behind flat objects in case there's something hidden behind them, discovering that a brick wall isn't as solid as the camera suggests and even more besides. Similarly, Mario's new skills also take advantage of the paper-thin stylings with the rotund plumber now able to fold himself up into a paper plane and glide over impassable expanses, curl into a tube to roll through small spaces and even turn side-on to slip through narrow passages or gratings. Again, there are instances where you'll hit an impasse only to have the answer staring you in the face, but there aren't so many as to disrupt your enjoyment.

And there's plenty of enjoyment to be had, whether you're refining your expertise with the turn-based combat system (probably the most complex part of the game, offering everything from basic attacks to Advanced, Special and even Stylish moves), uncovering the many side-quests or spotting the game's tongue-in-cheek self-referential humour. Yes, the story has weak spots – having to actually play through some of the cut-scenes can be annoying when all you want to do is get back to the action – but much of it is as absorbing as you'd hope from an RPG. It's not an easy game either, with the challenge level rising rather more sharply than you might anticipate given the game's initially welcoming exterior. But Intelligent Systems has created a solid and thought-provoking RPG first and a vehicle for Mario second. Anyone smart enough to see through the crayon-splashed visuals will find a game that's more than worthy of the Nintendo name.

FAQs

Q. TOO SIMILAR?
Although much of the interface and structure is the same as the original, the fact that it's a new adventure with extra improvements negates that.

Q. CHILDISH?
Not at all. Underneath the cartoon looks it's a complex and challenging RPG with enough subtle humour and self-referential moments to please everyone.

Q. TOO SHORT?
Depends. It's not on the same scale as something like *Tales Of Symphonia*, but there's at least 20 hours of gameplay here.



DOWN DOWN DEEPER AND DOWN

Perhaps it's merely coincidence, but much like the pages of the storybook that *Paper Mario* is trying to emulate the game continues to reveal hidden layers as you progress. Mario's adventure may begin slowly and be fairly linear at the off, but the range of sub-quests and mini-games (from providing help to those listing their problems at the Trouble Centre, playing games at the Pianta Parlour or even building up a list of recipes for useful items) has you continually chalking up notes in your memory for things you need to come back and do later. And if you're one of those completist RPG types, you want to do them all.




eMag

SHAKEN, STIRRED AND RUINED IN ALMOST EVERY WAY

GOLDENEYE: ROGUE AGENT



DETAILS





FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2, GameCube

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4 (1-16 Online)

Time is a cruel mistress. While we'll happily admit that *GoldenEye* on the N64 might not have stood the test of time too well, telling someone that they never actually had fun with it is something else entirely. But it's no exaggeration when we say that within an hour of playing this adopted half-brother of the original, you'll not only fail to see a single resemblance (besides the viewpoint, naturally) but also begin to question the validity of the entire brand. It's as though EA's woefully literal take on the *Bond* title, shameful plagiarism of ideas and characters, and utter disregard for story or continuity have invaded your brain and used some gadget to make you think that maybe the original was no better than this. Cunning. But trust us, it was – and it still is.

So flawed is this game that the list of problems that ail *Rogue Agent* would not only reach the moon if laid out end to end but would circle it several times. Enemies disappear almost immediately after death (sometimes before even hitting the ground). Becoming poisoned slows down time, actually making the game easier. A recovering health bar (thanks, *Halo*) rewards slow advancement rather than the action-packed shoot-outs you'll be looking for. Enemies will take each other hostage, oblivious to the fact that you have to kill both of them anyway. Then there's the multiplayer, a key element when the single-player game is as limp as it is, which fails almost entirely to excite. Even with such simple action as 'run along, shoot everything' at its core, this still manages to feel like a half-hearted effort from the world's biggest games company.

In short, we're cataclysmically disappointed that *Rogue Agent* even exists. Just when it seemed like EA had pulled its socks up and become a real unstoppable force with games to match its resources, we get this – perhaps the most cynical and cobbled-together excuse for a key release we've ever seen. This isn't just a waste of a licence but an insult to anyone who wished for a true sequel to *GoldenEye*. We'd have great trouble recommending this to anyone with even half a brain. Even if the other half was gold.



VERDICT 3/10
A SHAMBOLIC SLIGHT ON THE GOLDENEYE NAME

POSTAL 2



BETTER THAN

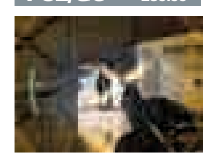


WORSE THAN



GOLDENEYE

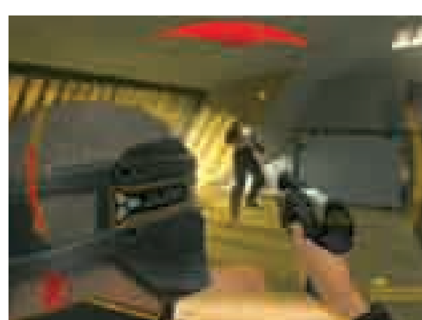
PS2/GC £39.99



Oh look. Two slightly inferior versions of a horrible game. PS2 owners get the 'bonus' of online play, if you can even call it that.



With an eye made of gold, you can totally see through walls. Wow.

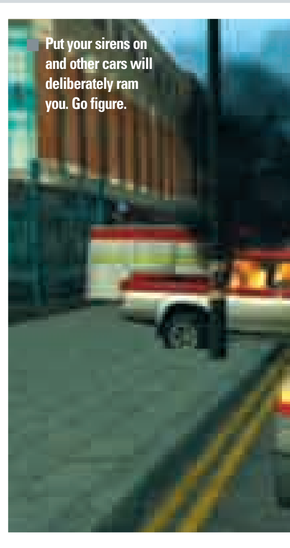


Taking hostages is a laugh, watching enemies do it even more so.



Dual-wielding in all its glory. You can even use your eye to jam guns, shield you from harm or use a Force Push-type attack. How silly.





Put your sirens on and other cars will deliberately ram you. Go figure.

Ooh, look, 'gritty' drama. Because all Londoners are sour-faced miseries with crap accents…

SONY'S SEQUEL MAKES GUY RITCHIE LOOK LIKE MICKEY SPILLANE

THE GETAWAY: BLACK MONDAY

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
SCEE

DEVELOPER
Team Soho

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

It's rare that a sequel lives up to its promise, but in a month when Microsoft ships *Halo 2* and Rockstar takes us to San Andreas, Sony is going to have to do a lot better than this. *The Getaway: Black Monday* is the turkey that gobbles itself – a mockney nightmare unlikely to satisfy anyone but the easily pleased in anything more than small doses. It's also in equal measures bland, frustrating, buggy and unconvincing, caring not for quality dialogue, characterisation or drama and reading like a sub-GCSE attempt to write an *EastEnders* script. It's an immense letdown – so much so that the first few hours of play are filled with disbelief, as players are forced to lower their expectations with each new disappointment.

It's difficult to understand what could have gone wrong: the first *Getaway* title was flawed but earned some merit as a competent driving game. Additionally, as Team Soho had already put in the hours to recreate a pseudo-photorealistic London, it presumably didn't have to add much more to it than a few tweaks and some new road markings to indicate Congestion Charge zones. Nonetheless, the developer has managed to take two steps backwards, delivering a charmless game that finds police brutality acceptably hilarious, and seems to revel in how big and clever profanity can be when repeated ad nauseam. Sadly, we've never agreed with either view, and are unlikely to change our minds any time soon having spent a few days driving round the capital with the tour guides *Black Monday* sees fit to inflict upon players.

The development time clearly went on creating more bizarre, motion-captured heads that sit atop body models from *GoldenEye* and emote much like Joe 90. There are three playable characters: Mitchell, the zombie-faced sub-hero from the first game; Eddie, a washed-up boxer whose trainer drags him into the underworld; and Sam, a 19-year old female super-thief with enough sass to make her seem almost appealing. The story, which is told fast-and-loose, jumping backwards and forwards without a hint of excitement, revolves around a heist seen from three perspectives. This would be a wonderful idea if it actually changed the gameplay mechanic with each character, but merely altering the move set (the boxer, instead of arresting people, will push them over, for example) does nothing to extend *Black Monday*'s appeal.

FAQs

Q. WHA' HAPPENED?
Beats us, but it's not half the game it should be.

Q. OFFENSIVE?
In practically every way. Especially to gamers and Latvians.

Q. CAPITAL FUN?
Only if you like scratching at your cheeks until you pull your face off.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Of the many landmarks faithfully recreated by Team Soho (which include Tate Modern, St Paul's Cathedral and Buckingham Palace), the least impressive must be the London Eye, which isn't animated and doesn't allow public access anywhere closer than 200 yards. However, an extended encounter on the London Underground, scouring a smoky snooker club for a missing relic and an early mission storming a boxing club all make better use of the quintessentially English setting, even if they do involve murdering most of the petty criminals you come across. Ironically, one aspect of London which has not been overlooked by Team Soho is the number of advertisement hoardings scattered around the city: frankly, the amount of product placement in *Black Monday* is staggering.

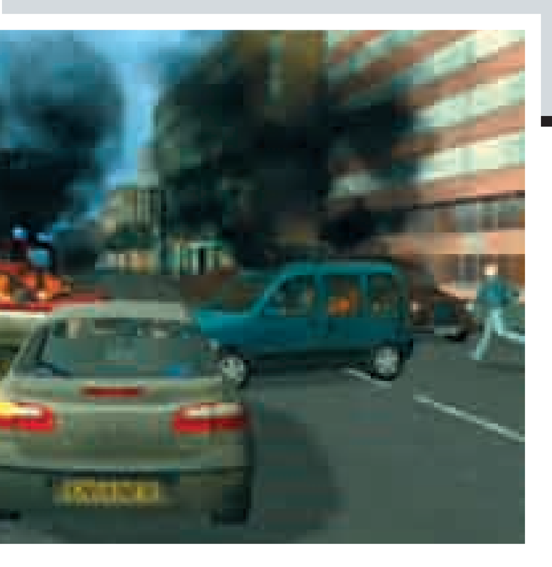
games™

FUSED

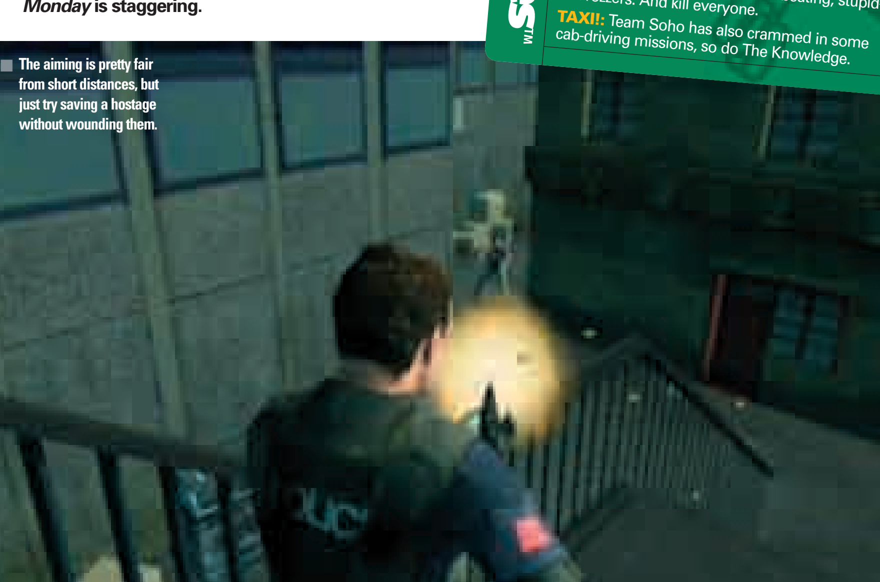
BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

COPS: Enter a world of criminal-beating, stupid-as-dirt rozzers. And kill everyone.

TAXI!: Team Soho has also crammed in some cab-driving missions, so do The Knowledge.







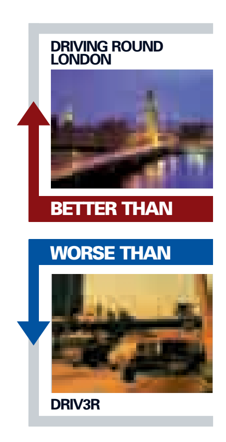
The aiming is pretty fair from short distances, but just try saving a hostage without wounding them.

But it's not just a problem of taste – this is also a bug-riddled, unrewarding mess comparable to *Driv3r* in terms of ill-judged development priorities. For one, Mitch looks like he's lost his shoulders most of the time, but even this can't excuse the way he glitches through bad guys, walls and cars. Enemies fall through solid objects, while some of the vehicle-based missions are so misjudged as to, say, begin your mission after a random crash in a cut-scene, leaving you pointing any way but forwards. Even the on-rails element – the single redeeming virtue of *Driv3r* – looks and feels prehistoric, as Eddie leans from a sunroof and kills every person east of Hounslow with an astonishing lack of panache. Elsewhere, the on-foot sections are crippled by a camera completely unsuited to interior action (to the extent that some narrow corridors don't have the space to move the camera around the protagonist). Add to this a level of artificial intelligence that makes the term seem oxymoronic and you have all the ingredients for a thoroughly underwhelming use of a licence.

However, the biggest gripe to be levelled at *Black Monday* is its complete lack of real-world logic; though set in the recognisable streets of London, the society represented within the game is about as close to London life as that in *Mary Poppins*. Why does every Yardie openly fire machine guns at marked police cars? Why do beat bobbies not hesitate in letting off a few rounds through a crowd of pedestrians if they spot you whizzing by? Aside from offering the best possible argument for not arming our police (you must kill around 300 people during Mitch's cop-based sections), Sony has inadvertently given us the best possible reason to buy third-party products this Christmas. *The Getaway: Black Monday* should be avoided by all but the most fervent lovers of mediocrity.



CHAVS WITH GUNS DO NOT A GAME MAKE





Here are your two new characters, Eddie and Sam. Each can be led through about a third of the game.



The sights may look familiar but the we swear that the characters are like no-one you've ever met. Or would want to.

DETAILS



FORMAT
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, GameCube, PC, Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER
Maxis

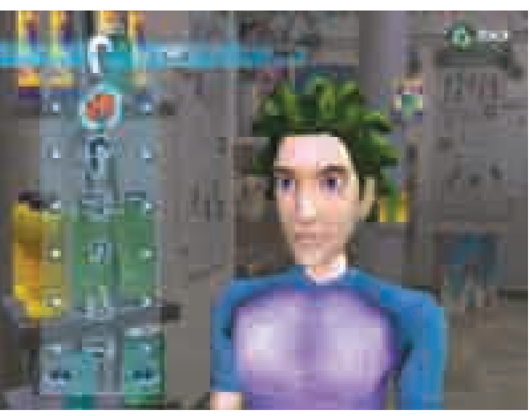
PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

THE URBZ: SIMS IN THE CITY

REPUTATION IS EVERYTHING, APPARENTLY



games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

URBAN FLAVA: *The Urbz* features special appearances from The Black Eyed Peas.

BIG-CITY PLAYER: The transition from the sticks to a neon-drenched cityscape is impressive.

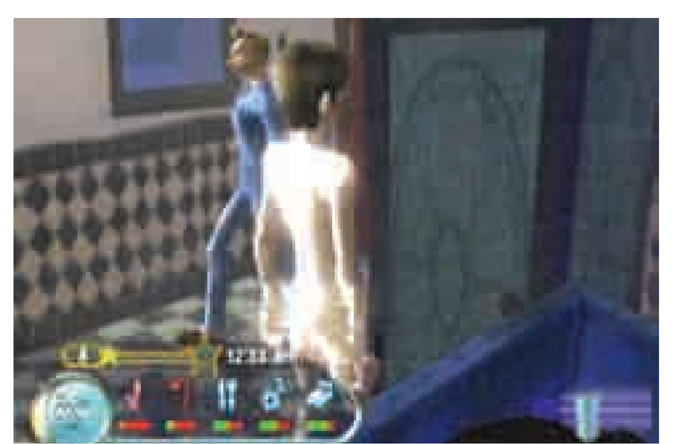
With *The Sims 2* dominating the charts as one of EA's most successful PC releases to date, it would seem fitting for the mammoth title to find its way onto consoles almost instantaneously. Surprisingly, EA has instead taken the console side of the franchise in an entirely new direction. The result: *The Urbz*, a bright-lights, big-city take on gamers' beloved race.

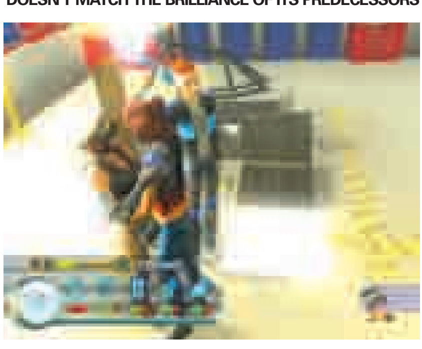
In this new-found world, simply going about your daily business is not enough. Not only do you have to adhere to the ground rules set by the previous instalments, you also have to build your reputation, expand your 'crew' and influence those around you in order to make a difference. Or you can simply fumble around until eventually you become nothing more than a blip on the social map – the choice is yours. At the outset only a small area is available for you to explore but once you find yourself a job, earn some money and complete a number of objectives, new areas are unlocked. Sure, it's formulaic, but as you're introduced to new social groups such as the Punks, you then have to dress and behave like them in order to get accepted into their community, which offers up a welcome dose of gameplay variety. Once you've found your way into the many social circles you begin setting trends – city dwellers start to mimic your dress sense and so on until you feel the need to start over from scratch.

Unfortunately, the biggest problem with EA's latest venture is the 'moral' beneath the bubbly context – getting ahead in life means following the crowd. Achieving the approval of your peers is a strikingly repugnant goal and those who read between the lines will find this a painful task. In many ways, *The Urbz* feels like a step back for the franchise; despite EA's efforts to bring gamers a 'console exclusive' there's not a lot on offer here. Fans won't find anything new, but newcomers may well discover the pleasure of the series and seek out EA's back catalogue of simulated lifestyles.

VERDICT 6/10
DOESN'T MATCH THE BRILLIANCE OF ITS PREDECESSORS

■ Keeping your Urb clean is something you'll find you have to do to stupidly excessive levels.





THE SIMS: BUSTIN' OUT

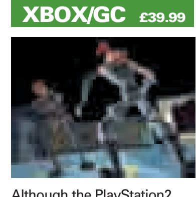


AS GOOD AS

WORSE THAN

THE SIMS 2

XBOX/GC £39.99



Although the PlayStation2 version has the added bonus of EyeToy usage, the Xbox and GameCube iterations have slightly more polished graphics and faster loading times.


eMag

Stealing a SWAT van probably isn't the best idea when you're in the middle of a mission – you're likely to attract a lot of attention.

Rampages are still present, although the sudden influx of enemies they cause makes them slightly easier than we seem to remember.

games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

MISSIONARY: This learns from *GTA III* by including sub-games when driving a taxi, cop car or ambulance.

EYE FOR DETAIL: Additions such as soundbites and cut-scenes add flavour over the old 2D games.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Rockstar Games

DEVELOPER
Digital Eclipse

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

GRAND THEFT AUTO

THE GBA TERRIER TO THE PS2'S ROTTWEILER – SMALLER, BUT JUST AS VIOLENT

Far be it for us to accuse Rockstar of attempting to piggyback the GBA version of *Grand Theft Auto* on the hype surrounding *San Andreas*, but, well, we are. Certainly, it's to Rockstar's credit that it had the courtesy to create an entirely new game for the Game Boy Advance rather than simply port across one of the older PC or PSone titles, and the rejuvenated (if slightly garish and jerky) visuals accentuate this fact. Despite being 'all new', however, the fact that the game falls short of matching the original *GTA*'s variety proves to be its biggest failing.

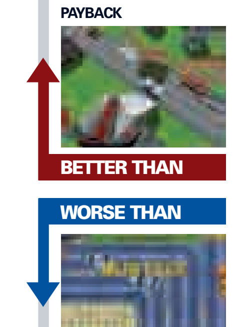
The problem really lies with the game being far too stilted and linear, shunting players from one mission to the next without giving them much choice in the matter. In drawing the game back to its rawest roots, Rockstar has done the series an injustice by taking one step back too many; rather than acting as a suitable handheld foil to the PS2 release of *San Andreas*, the GBA version can't even best the original *GTA* game's fairly limited mission structure.

True, Rockstar has seen fit to add a few minor distractions to break up the linearity – *GTA III*'s sub-tasks such as taxi, emergency and vigilante goals are all present, as are various street races that require you to hit multiple checkpoints in a set time – but it's the blandness of the central missions and, more specifically, the fact you only have one to choose from at a time that spoils the package. Even the fairly basic Respect system from *GTA 2*, where the player could move at their own discretion between working for rival gangs on the same map, would have been welcome here to help mix things up a bit but, alas, it's not.

Throw in an incredibly jerky frame rate and we just can't help feeling that Rockstar has done its biggest franchise a massive injustice. Where we wanted a game reflecting the state of the *GTA* series, we've got one that, by today's standards, is narrow in its scope and a shadow of its current self. It's certainly not a terrible game by any means, but it's far from the eight or nine we were expecting to award it. No doubt the limitations of the hardware will be partly blamed for that, but it's hard not to think that the results feel more like a wet slap in the face rather than a shotgun blast to the chest.

VERDICT 4/10

A CYNICALLY TIMED, BUT STILL PLAYABLE, GTA RELEASE



DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2, GameCube, Game Boy Advance, PC

ORIGIN
Canada

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER
In-house

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

SOME PEOPLE MIGHT SAY MY LIFE IS IN A RUT…

NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2

Everyone has a dream car. It's because of this, and the fact that everyone secretly wants to strap spoilers to the rear and vomit-inducing neon lights to the underside of that car, that *Need For Speed Underground* was such a hit – and why this sequel will sell just as well.

The greatest difference between this and the first game is the way in which you select your races. The whole city is now a free-roaming environment and races are marked on the map for you to get to when you like. This allows you to pick which events you take part in rather than having them forced upon you like in many other racers. Admittedly, you won't get very far if you ignore the more difficult events as these are the races that will earn you the most cash and unlock the parts that you'll need to ensure your ride is the fastest on the track.

As well as this, the new map hosts all the shops and garages you need to pimp your ride – graphics shops, performance garages and car lots are scattered around waiting to be found. Although more realistic, this element of the new system is rather irritating, as to get a vehicle up to scratch you need to traipse around several shops, which can be annoyingly time consuming when all you want to do is race around a few airport runways. Shopping aside, the new hub area works well and adds depth to an otherwise pretty standard racer. New city areas unlock with time and other drivers you meet can be challenged to a short race if you fancy earning a little extra cash.



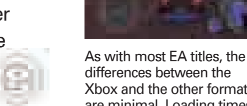
The new free-roaming area will act as a hub for all of the racing action.

Unfortunately, the extras and vehicle customisation can't change the fact that the actual racing feels very average. The tracks seem to be more winding than the last game, which detracts from the feeling of speed, and the handling feels very sloppy when compared to other recent games in the genre. Admittedly, this depends on how you fix up the five cars you're allowed to own, but having to wait until 75 per cent completion to have a fast yet controllable car is a bit of a pain and – with the game being so huge – many may not bother.



VERDICT 6/10
A SLIGHT IMPROVEMENT ON THE ORIGINAL

PS2/GC OUT NOW



As with most EA titles, the differences between the Xbox and the other formats are minimal. Loading times are predictably slightly longer on the PS2 and GameCube, but the visuals and sound seem to lose very little.

JUICED



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

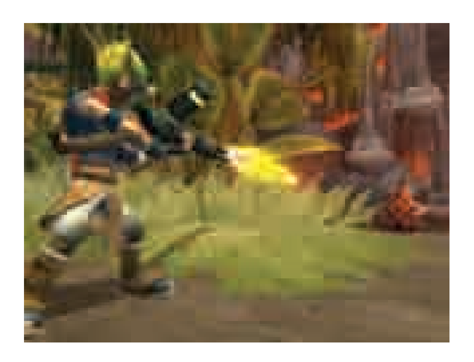


BURNOUT 3



The customisation options will allow you create as phat a car as you can possibly imagine.

It may not be as fast as *Burnout 3*, but *NFSU2* will certainly test your reflexes.







games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

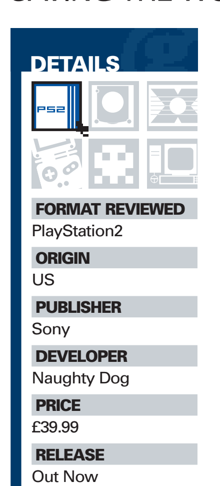
BRAVE NEW WORLD: Outside the city from *Jak II*, players must travel in primitive dune buggies.

LIGHT JAK: There's a *NiGHTS*-style flying angel to accompany the last game's Dark Jak powers.

JAK 3

SAVING THE WORLD, ONE CORNY JOKE AT A TIME

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Sony

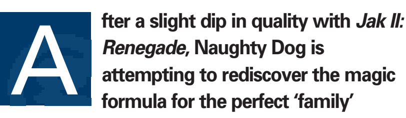
DEVELOPER
Naughty Dog

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

There are four different buggies used to travel between levels as well as collect items.



After a slight dip in quality with *Jak II: Renegade,* Naughty Dog is attempting to rediscover the magic formula for the perfect 'family' game that it found with the first title in the series. Sadly, it's discovered a world dominated by bittiness and controlled with manipulative, cheesy emotion.

Picking up from the events at the end of the last game, Jak is banished along with Daxter and Pecker (the parrot-monkey), taking up Mad Max-style refuge in the wilderness surrounding the city. After completing some simple initiation challenges (collect orbs! fight!), you're welcomed into a nomadic tribe, and here *Jak 3* opens up, with a huge desert hubworld negotiated in a dune buggy connecting the myriad sub-games which account for most of the levels. The mini-games range from the simple (such as driving missions) to the downright frustrating (shooting train-track points on a hoverboard, for example), and it's clear that the creative innovation that keeps the series popular has been firing on all cylinders when designing *Jak 3*.

However, despite its strong narrative premise, the game suffers due to implementation issues. There are multiple elements here but it's become very difficult to care about the wheres and whys of Jak's mission. Maybe it's got something to do with Jak himself coming across like a videogame hero as designed by committee, as though Naughty Dog sat down with the gaming world's Simon Cowell and asked, 'Can you make us a star?' Still, at least Daxter is on hand to provide jokes at the most inopportune moments like a *Buffy* character with no real narrative purpose.

Sure, it's all beautifully put together, and you'll be hard-pushed to find an adventure-lite world as well realised as here, incorporating as it does cities and wasteland, caves and skies as you fly with the new Light Jak upgrade. However, despite all the creative effort *Jak 3* is exactly the sum of its parts, and feels all the more underwhelming because of it.

VERDICT 6/10

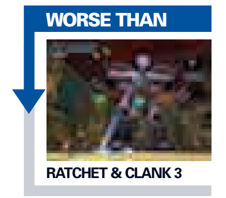
A MIXED BAG, WHERE THE GREAT MEETS THE AWFUL

JAK II: RENEGADE



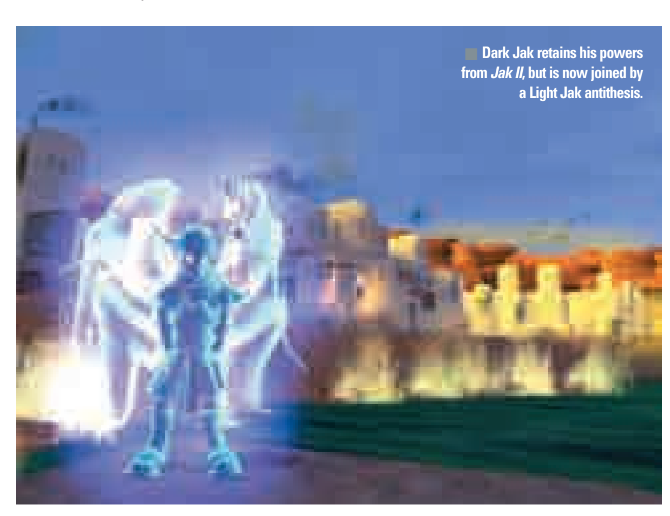
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



RATCHET & CLANK 3





Dark Jak retains his powers from *Jak II*, but is now joined by a Light Jak antithesis.


eMag

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Atari

DEVELOPER
Frontier

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

MINIMUM SPEC
Pentium III 733 MHz Processor, 128Mb RAM, 250Mb hard drive space, 32Mb video card

IF YOU BUILD IT THEY WILL RIDE. SOMETIMES

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3

Going up against the popular *Theme Park* series, *RollerCoaster Tycoon* was never in for an easy ride (sorry). However despite the popularity of Bullfrog's fun-park creation, *RollerCoaster Tycoon* has managed to garner its own set of loyal fans interested in rides, puking children and, of course, the experience of running their own theme park.

Much has changed in *Tycoon 3*. The most obvious difference is the move into 3D and the new ability to move the camera in, out and around. The next is the option to actually get on each ride and experience the nose-bleeding effect of your creations, which can be genuinely disorientating if you sit close enough to a large monitor. What you actually get up to is pretty much the same as before. Career mode sees you take over at a range of failing or newly built theme parks where you're presented with objectives that must be met in order to complete the level. This invariably involves hiring staff to clean the place up and ensure the rides are working, and adding more rides until your goals are met.

A few unusual occurrences stand in your way to success, though. Rides will often remain oddly empty despite your park being full, even when you lower the price to practically nothing. Some rides are hugely popular, attracting massive queues of people all moaning that it takes too long to get on, yet they'll all stay in the queue even when you open a second version of the same ride. When things don't go your way it's confusing as there's nothing to guide you bar the thoughts of individual people, which are invariably vague and along the lines of "I'm not thirsty", which doesn't explain what's wrong.

Still, the problems that are here don't detract from the fascinatingly hardcore option to leave the Career mode behind and create your own park in Sandbox mode without constraints of time and money. While pre-made rollercoasters exist, most of your time will be spent perfecting your own incredibly complex designs, which is what it's all about really. And while it's immensely hard to get this right, it's massively satisfying when you do.

games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

BANGIN' CHOONS: Add your own MP3s to rides and banish the default freeview-porn-esque music.

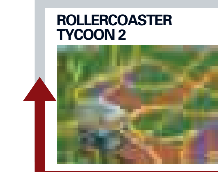
A REAL CRACKER: As well as creating wonderful rides, you can also orchestrate firework displays.

VERDICT 7/10

GLORIOUSLY COMPLICATED, YET OFTEN ILLOGICAL

BETTER THAN

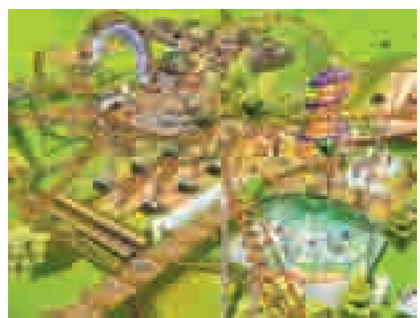
ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2



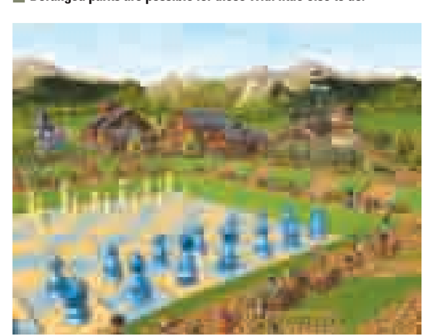
WORSE THAN



REAL THEME PARKS



Deranged parks are possible for those with little else to do.



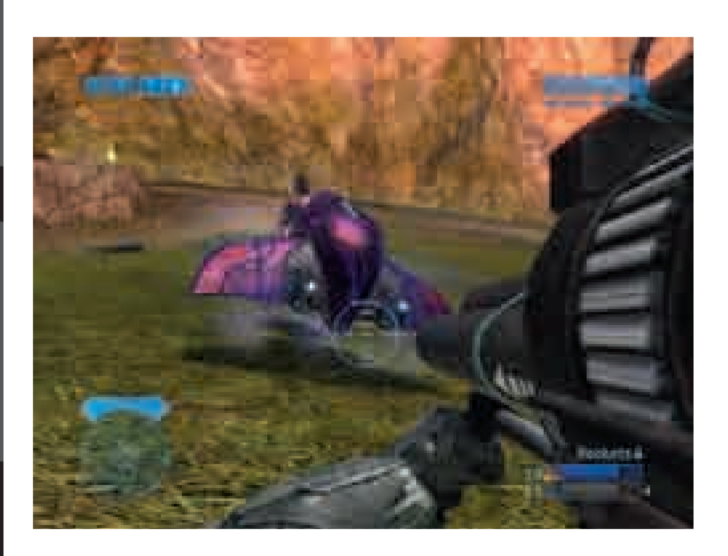
Just what every decent theme park needs – a giant chessboard.



As time passes in *RollerCoaster Tycoon 3* day turns into night, resulting in some fine light shows.


eMag


The Brute Shot might have a slow firing rate, but that huge blade on the back makes up for it.



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Microsoft

DEVELOPER
Bungie

PRICE
£39.99
(£59.99 Limited Edition)

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4 (1-16 Online)

HALO 2

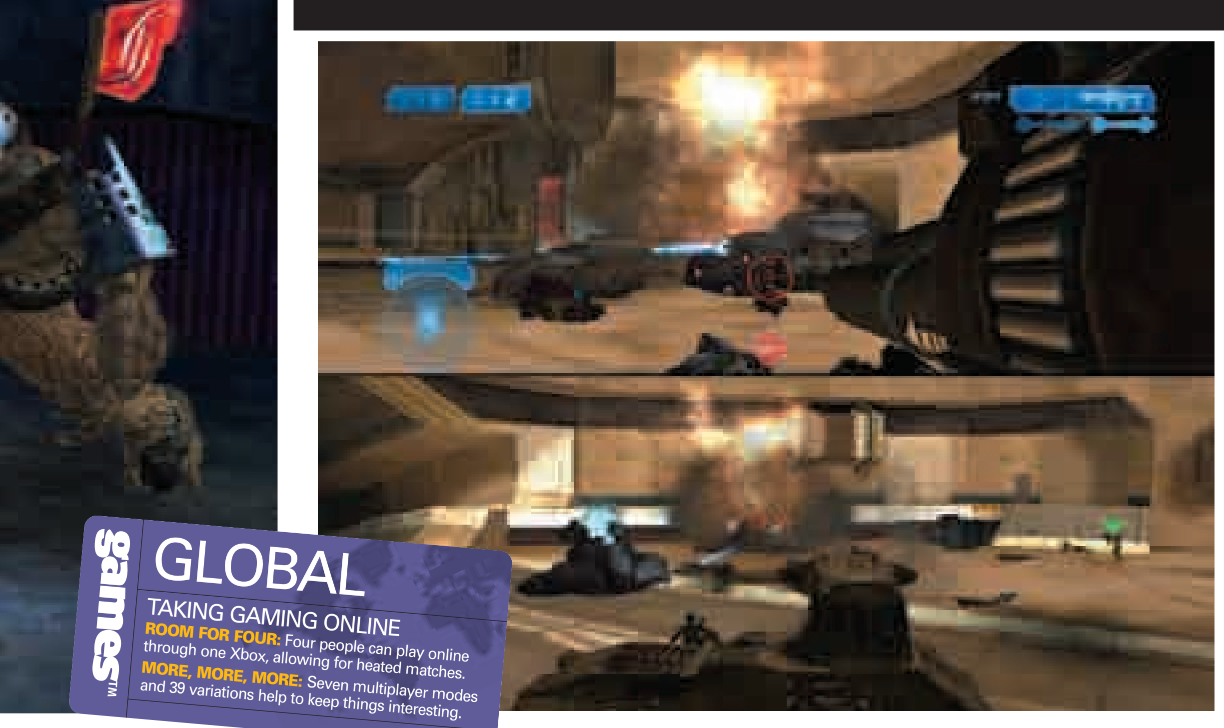
THE GREATEST XBOX GAME EVER? NO. BUT YEAH, BUT NO, BUT YEAH…

Was there ever any doubt that the sequel to the Xbox's biggest selling title would fall short of the expectations already set for it? Unquestionably, in our eyes at least, the answer has to be a resounding no. But then, that's hardly Bungie's fault – we'll readily admit, even just two sentences into the review, that *Halo 2* is an Xbox highlight that the developer can be hugely proud of. Despite what you may have heard from various sources, however, it isn't the videogame equivalent of the Second Coming, which leaves us thinking that many people are going to feel slightly let down; not disappointed as such, but certainly a little deflated. Unless, of course, they fall into the obligatory 'OMGHalo2 roolz!!111!!' set, in which case they'll be too busy being l33t to care.

Does that sound overly negative for the opening of a review for a game that we're finding hugely enjoyable? Perhaps. Our main concern is that *Halo 2* is guaranteed to be a hit for all the wrong reasons. Some people will buy the game simply because it's *Halo 2* – not because it's a highly involving first-person blasting marathon that'll leave them continually wondering what lies beyond the next checkpoint and whether they'll be able to make it there in one piece. They'll buy it because everyone else is buying it, not because they want a game that offers both exquisitely fraught and tense single-player action and hugely entertaining multiplayer modes that will come to dominate your time in a decidedly unhealthy way. Worst of all, they'll buy it because they feel they have to, rather than want to. It's a hollow victory, if only because *Halo 2* will do well primarily because of hype, not because Bungie has actually created a game worth buying. Depressing isn't the word.

Without a doubt, *Halo 2* does almost everything you'd expect in an expertly crafted FPS title and delivers it with aplomb. That said, only those who haven't controlled Master Chief


The Covenant move thick and fast across open ground – just what you'd expect from a superior alien race.



FAQs

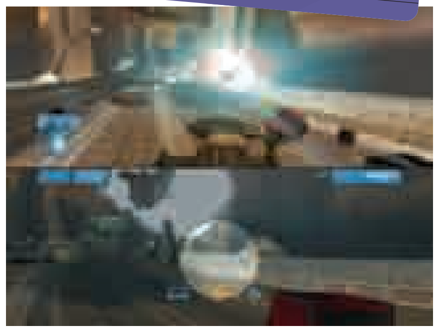
Q: HOW LONG?
Officially, *Halo 2* has 15 levels, although one of those is the opening cut-scene and another is an incredibly short training section. So, 13 'proper' levels then.

Q: CLIFFHANGER?
Of course there's a cliffhanger – not only does it point to *Halo 3* already being a certainty, but it'll leave you gagging for more (or perhaps feeling slightly short-changed).

Q: BEST MULTIPLAYER?
It can depend on who you're playing with, but we've got a soft spot for Rocketball – a modified version of Oddball where only a rocket launcher will do.

More maps would have been nice, but there are enough here to cater for most game types.

games™ GLOBAL
TAKING GAMING ONLINE
ROOM FOR FOUR: Four people can play online through one Xbox, allowing for heated matches.
MORE, MORE, MORE: Seven multiplayer modes and 39 variations help to keep things interesting.





before will be unprepared for the frantic action awaiting them, as *Halo 2*'s single-player mode merely adds some welcome tweaks to what is essentially the same experience as before (bar some improved level design that ensures tiresome mistakes such as the Library never happen again). It's these small tweaks that elevate the gameplay to a level beyond that of the original; minor additions and fixes that seem trivial on paper but combine to offer a more polished experience.

Dual wielding of weaponry, for instance, sounds like a fairly obvious and unnecessary addition (we couldn't help but frown at the incessant whooping and hollering demonstrated by the E3 audience when Bungie unveiled the ability). In reality, though, the ability to carry two light guns such as SMGs or Plasma Rifles rather than a single powerful one helps to balance things up nicely, meaning that you'll never find yourself passing a checkpoint feeling you're outgunned on the road ahead. That's not to say you can now just run around with all guns blazing, however; success is still very much dependent on ammunition management, particularly as running dry on two guns simultaneously leaves you even more vulnerable than with one. Add the fact that dual wielding also negates your ability to use grenades or melee attacks and you soon realise that the function is far more of a strategic decision than it first appears to be.

And then there's the AI – something that made the original *Halo* unique and continues to improve for the sequel… for the most part, anyway. Your Covenant opposition (as well as other foes that, for legal reasons, we won't be discussing here) show some remarkable thinking patterns at times, particularly when the game is pushed up to the higher difficulties of the Heroic and Legendary settings. They'll follow numerous attack patterns (not just the 'little bastards up front, big ones behind' Sergeant Johnson warns you of during the opening firefight) back off if they feel outgunned, take to high ground to give themselves a better line of sight and even set up flanking ambushes that can catch trigger-happy players completely off guard. Having had their intelligence increased to a level commonly known as 'clever sons of bitches', *Halo 2*'s enemies are now as varied in their attacks as they are dangerous – something that'll be as

THE MYTH, THE LEGEND

According to Bungie, only those with no prior experience of *Halo* can be excused for playing *Halo 2* on the default Normal difficulty setting; everyone else should plump straight for Heroic, which will present a suitably tricky challenge for most FPS aficionados. As before, though, the game becomes a decidedly different beast when set on Legendary, with the Covenant becoming the kind of alien force you'd expect to try to take over the universe. Faultless accuracy, ferocious firepower, unwavering relentlessness and a Master Chief who's no more resistant to attack than every other gung-ho marine – it's almost like a completely new challenge, albeit one that only the most persistent players will manage to conquer.

"THE ABILITY TO CARRY TWO SMALLER GUNS AT ONCE, RATHER THAN JUST ONE POWERFUL ONE, BALANCES THINGS NICELY. YOU'LL NEVER FIND YOURSELF PASSING A CHECKPOINT FEELING YOU'RE GOING TO BE OUTGUNNED ON THE ROAD AHEAD"





Multiplayer is all about the three-man vehicles – storm in with a Warthog and you'll have a man-made massacre in no time.

pleasing to returning *Halo* fans as it will be to series newcomers.

Unfortunately, it isn't all perfect. While the infantry AI (both your side and the opposition) shows significant enhancements in its reactions towards you, the same can't be said for enemies in vehicles; compared to their ground-based companions, their incompetence is astounding. Vehicle-bound NPCs will happily speed into walls, obstacles or even each other in an attempt to get around, as well as mowing you down at every opportunity whether they mean to or not. Piloting a Ghost around only to be rammed repeatedly by an ally just because you happen to be blocking where he wants to go, or sitting in a Warthog turret while the driver continually slams into an impassable object, isn't exactly what we'd define as cutting-edge AI – why it's like this when the remaining AI seems so advanced has us slightly bemused.

But it's an error that only raises its ugly head on a small number of levels and doesn't really spoil what is otherwise a very enjoyable single-player experience; enough polish has been applied to ensure it surpasses that offered by the original game, which is ideally what sequels are supposed to do. But then if polishing was all there was to its enhancements, *Halo 2* would only be marginally better than its predecessor in the eyes of even the most blinkered fanatic.

games™

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

ON THE LEVEL: The level design in *Halo 2* is more interesting than the original, though still rather linear.

TWO FOR ONE: Two guns at once – not an original idea, but one that proves incredibly fulfilling.

HALO

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

HALF-LIFE


Mounting an enemy vehicle (be it Covenant or Spartan) isn't tough. Unless, of course, it's moving…

GOOD FRIENDS, BETTER ENEMIES

For us, *Halo 2*'s multiplayer is where the real joy lies, with the wide range of modes ensuring there's something for everyone. Standard options such as Slayer (or Deathmatch, to the layperson), King Of The Hill, Juggernaut and Capture The Flag are as involving as ever, while more obscure reappearances such as Oddball (hold onto the 'ball' for as long as you can without being slaughtered) prove to be incredibly enjoyable when played with a few modifications. There's also the *Battlefield*-inspired Territories mode (capture the checkpoints and hold them for a set period of time) and Assault (arm bombs on your enemy's checkpoint and blow them to pieces), although the latter isn't quite as involving as we might have hoped.

"A FEW MORE LEVELS WOULD HAVE BEEN NICE, BUT NO DOUBT SOME DOWNLOADABLE CONTENT WILL RECTIFY THAT IN THE NEAR FUTURE"

However, it appears that Bungie has been saving even more tweaking for the game's multiplayer elements; not surprising, considering this is likely to have become the most played game on Xbox Live by the time you read this. Tighter, faster, more frantic: *Halo 2* supersedes its predecessor's efforts by offering a multiplayer mode with almost every refinement a decent FPS should boast.

To say there's plenty here is an understatement. Seven different game types (many of which return from the original *Halo*) are on offer, each with their own modifiers to make things a bit more interesting and bring the total game-type tally up to a respectable 39. And that's before you take in the option to create your own game types, thanks to the ability to edit weapons, maps, time limits, score counts and other key criteria – limitless isn't quite the word, but you certainly won't get bored in a hurry. The maps have also been worked on to a satisfying degree, with a good selection of small, medium and large maps available from the off; a few more than 11 would have been nice but no doubt downloadable content will rectify that in the near future. No one map feels too big or too small if played in the right mode, but there aren't that many instances where you can get it really wrong. Against *Halo*'s sprawling multiplayer maps that felt too big at times, the sequel manages to get the balance just right – especially since the added joys of Xbox Live mean you'll never be left wanting for a few extra players if you need them.

And balance is probably the defining achievement of *Halo 2* – Bungie has managed to whittle away many of the elements we felt uncomfortable with in the original game (specifically some dull level design and unappealing multiplayer), as well as adding enough polish to make *Halo 2*'s gameplay shine. Does it live up to the hype by delivering the greatest game ever created? Well, no. But as a sequel that's good enough to convert even those gamers who didn't enjoy the original title, we doubt anyone could have asked for anything more.

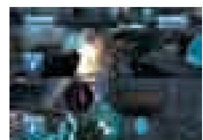


VERDICT 9/10
AND SO THE WAIT FOR HALO 3 BEGINS

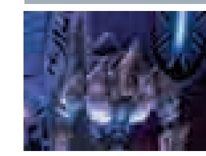
24:00 TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

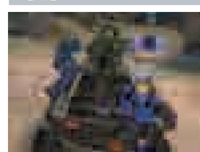
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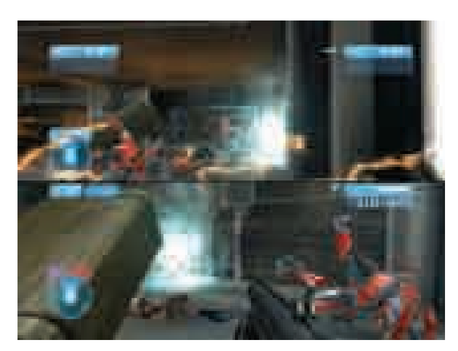

Well, this is familiar – just one opening cut-scene in and the Covenant are invading your ship. Again. Time to suit up and ship out, Master Chief – your enemy awaits.

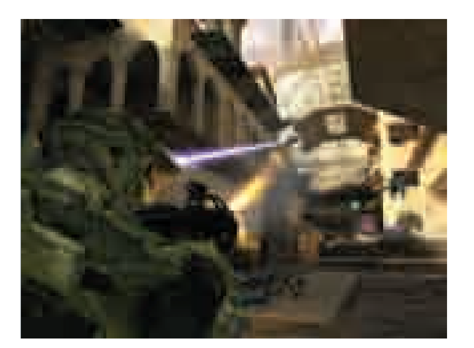
03:00 HOURS

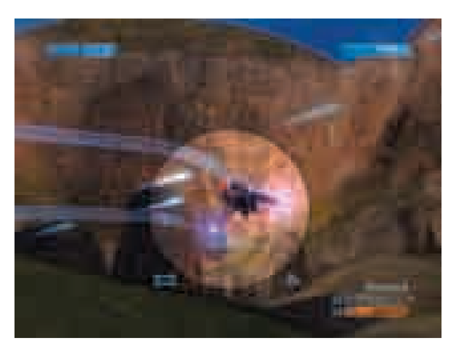

Now there's a twist (although anyone who's been busy reading internet spoilers or has a decent head on their shoulders should have seen it coming).

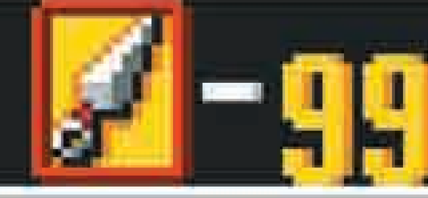
4 DAYS


Unless you're playing on Legendary you'll have seen all of what the single-player game has to offer. Oh, and the Live modes will now rule your existence.


Co-op play – the staple of every *Halo* adventure, especially on Legendary.


Sometimes it pays to take cover – those snipers are pretty accurate.


Just because you're airborne doesn't mean they can't hit you.



Rough like a ninja, stinging like a bee **Revenge Of Shinobi Mega Drive [Sega] 1989**


- 4


eMag



A PARAGON PUBLICATION
NO.26 DEC 2004
00p
RETRO
CRO GAM
Christmas Special
THE MONTHLY OLD-SCHOOL SOFTWARE REVIEW
CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF SONY'S PLAYSTATION
Collecting 2D PlayStation classics
CHAMPAGNE
CASTLEVANIA
SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
THE GREATEST RETRO GAME EVER?
AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVID ANDERSON
PLUS
RETRO NEWS,
BUYERS GUIDE & GTM,
RETRO CONTACT,
ULTIMATE COLLECTION,
GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT,
AND MUCH MORE…

RETRO NEWS

Find out what's going on in the here and now of retro gaming

I'm feeling old and more then a little bit humble. I was a sprightly 21-year-old when Sony entered the console market, and I never believed for one moment that it would hold the same iron grip on the industry that the likes of Nintendo, Atari and Sega once enjoyed.

Nevertheless, it's now ten years later and while I've put on more than a little weight, got myself shackled for life and bought way too many new consoles, Sony's machine is still happily chugging along. Retro regulars will no doubt be surprised (and perhaps a little annoyed) that this current issue is totally dedicated to Sony's machine, but at least it allows me to discuss our definition of how we decide what's retro.

It's impossible to draw a specific line where retro gaming begins and ends, because it means so many things to so many different people. For many old codgers, true retro gaming is anything that appeared on the 8-bit consoles and computers, while others have fond memories of the SNES and Mega Drive era. Others link retro to their youths, so essentially even the PlayStation is now considered old hat by those in their late teens and early twenties.

Retro won't be losing its focus, though, and as of next month we'll continue to cover the same variety of great games that you love reading about.



Darran Jones, Retro Editor

RETURN OF THE MANFRED

CLASSIC 8-BIT DEVELOPER IS BACK WITH A NEW STUDIO

The name Manfred Trenz may not be familiar to everyone, but if you were a Commodore 64 owner it's quite possible that he meant more to you than your own parents. Trenz is the creator of the *Turrican* series and has just founded a new development company that has got his fans very, very excited. Denaris Entertainment Software is concentrating on making titles for the PC, C64, Game Boy Advance and Nintendo DS and has already revealed its first title, a sequel to the Commodore 64 hit *Katakis*.

Currently scheduled to appear in early 2005, *Katakis 2* will initially be released for the C64 and PC, with additional versions possibly appearing on the GBA and DS, although there have also been requests for the game to appear on the Amiga, Mac and Dreamcast. Keen to find out more about his new company and projects, we tracked Trenz down and had a few words.

Q: What have you been up to the last few years?
A: I've been working for several companies and doing conversions of their titles. The most recent games I've been working on include *Micro Machines V3* for the Game Boy Color, *CT Special Forces* and *Moorhuhn Kart* for the PSone.

Q: What are you hoping to achieve with Denaris Entertainment Software?
A: I'm really looking forward to creating some great games with my own team. Of course, we've no problems with doing conversions, but our main focus will lie in our own creations.



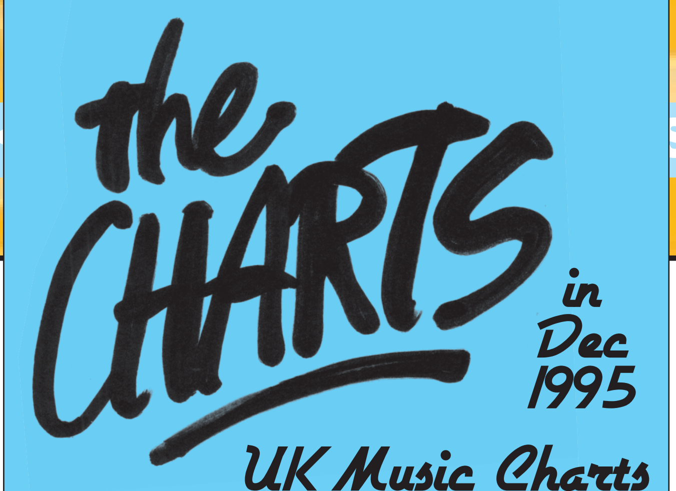
▲ *Katakis 2*, which promises to steal as many hours as the fabled *Turrican*.

Q: What can you tell us about *Katakis 2*?
A: Basically, it's all about action, destruction and fun. *Katakis 2* will feature a lot of new weapons, brand new enemy designs, new movements for real fights and, of course, huge stages and bosses. It's not going to be a typical right-to-left scrolling game of yesterday as we'll be using a 3D environment to achieve the best results in display and gameplay.

Q: Why release *Katakis 2* on the C64?
A: It's basically one of those crazy spontaneous ideas that happens every now and then. One of our coders has recently completed *Turrican 3* for the C64 and wants to make *Katakis 2* just for fun.

Q: Can we expect to see a new *Turrican* game in the near future, or perhaps a GBA compilation of previous titles?
A: Unfortunately, this is something that is no longer in my hands. The rights of the name Turrican now lie in the hands of THQ, so it's extremely unlikely that anything will be happening in the near future.

Q: What projects have you got planned for the future?
A: Although we have plenty of new projects lined up for 2005, we're currently concentrating all of our efforts on *Katakis 2*.



UK Music Charts

1 FATHER AND SON	BOYZONE
2 EARTH SONG	MICHAEL JACKSON
3 I BELIEVE/UP ON THE ROOF	ROBSON GREEN & JEROME FLYNN
4 GANGSTA'S PARADISE	COOLIO FEATURING L.V.
5 MISSING	EVERYTHING BUT THE GIRL
6 IT'S OH SO QUIET	BJÖRK
7 WONDERWALL	OASIS
8 FREE AS A BIRD	BEATLES
9 ONE SWEET DAY	MARIAH CAREY & BOYZ II MEN
10 ANYWHERE IS	ENYA

PlayStation games you were playing in 1995

1 DESTRUCTION DERBY	SCEE
2 TEKKEN	SCEE
3 WIPEOUT	SCEE
4 BATTLE ARENA TOSHINDEN	SCEE
5 MORTAL KOMBAT 3	SCEE
6 STREET FIGHTER: THE MOVIE	ACCLAIM
7 LEMMINGS 3D	SCEE
8 THEME PARK	BULLFROG/ELECTRONIC ARTS
9 ACE COMBAT	NAMCO/SCEE
10 RIDGE RACER	SCEE

Piracy's bad, mmkay?

Nintendo puts a stop to illegal games machine

Nintendo has issued a temporary restraining order on all videogame systems that contain counterfeit versions of classic NES titles – and devices that look like N64 pads are the main offenders.

Going by names like 'Super Joystick', 'Powerjoy' and 'Power Player' the devices plug straight into the TV and contain countless illegal NES games. Classic titles like *Mario Bros* and *Donkey Kong* are available on the machines which are widely available in US stores and can now be found in the UK.

For a company that's so protective of its intellectual property, it's odd that it's taken Nintendo so long to act – these devices have been around for years. Maybe it's worried about the effect they'll have on sales of its upcoming NES Classics range…

GAMING NEWS

Taito's top thirty

Empire Interactive jumps on the retro bandwagon

With *Midway Arcade Treasures Volumes 1* and *2* now available at all good retailers, Empire Interactive has become the next publisher to reveal a brand new retro collection for today's consoles.

***Taito Arcade Classics* will be released early in 2005 and is set to include 30 classic Taito titles from the past 25 years. Empire Interactive was still negotiating titles as we went to press, but it would appear that the likes of *Space Invaders, Rainbow Islands, Operation Wolf* and *Bubble Bobble* would all be included. Taito has an impressive library of classic titles and with any luck we'll also see the likes of *The New Zealand Story, Chase HQ, Wardner, Arkanoid, Qix* and *Darius* on the final compilation.**

It's unclear if any scoreboard modes for the likes of Xbox Live will be included, or if there will be behind-the-scenes interviews like those on the Midway discs, but we'll keep you posted.

Going once, going twice… sold!

Astonishing sales on eBay

In its heyday, *Crash* was one of the most popular Spectrum magazines around, so it's perhaps unsurprising that an issue sold on eBay for a rather tidy sum last month. The lucky winner picked up the first issue of the magazine for £31. Sure, the magazine wasn't exactly mint, but what do you expect for a publication that's over 20 years old?

The world's biggest internet auction website is always a good place to pick up a ready-made collection, but even we were astounded by the amount of machines that were in one eBayer's lot. It looked like more like a warehouse sale. The massive hardware collection consisted of 1,355 items, including 78 NES consoles, 60 SNES machines, eight Sega Saturns, 33 PlayStations and more joysticks and power leads then you'd know what to do with. In all, there were 290 working systems ranging from the Atari 2600 to the PlayStation2 and the auction eventually ended at $11,500 (around £6,250). If only the seller had included some games…





▲ *Vagrant Story* is up there with the best of them when it comes to absorbing and visually stunning RPGs.



▲ Build up your weapons and one day you'll have a sword bigger than that great horned… thing.

GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT



Vagrant Story

SEEN IT IN GAMESTATION FOR A BIT MORE THAN MOST OF THE OTHER TAT? THERE'S A GOOD REASON FOR THAT…

Format: PlayStation
Release: 2000
Publisher: Square
Developers: In-House

While much of the world may know Square Enix for the *Final Fantasy* series and little else, there's a whole catalogue of gems that have been overshadowed by the world's biggest RPG series. From quirky delights like *Threads Of Fate* to spin-off silliness such as *Chocobo Racing*, Japan's purveyors of quality role play (not to mention the instigators of much excellent cosplay) have tried it all. And usually failed. But on 21 June 2000, Square released its most criminally underrated title yet in *Vagrant Story*, a game aimed squarely at the hardcore market (on the firm's own admission).

Taking on the role of Ashley Riot, a 20-something Riskbreaker with as troubled a past as any Square hero, you're dropped into a spiralling plot that extends far beyond the standard RPG fare. Risk itself brought a very tactical element to the game, meaning that while you were free to rattle off lengthy chain combos (once you mastered the timing, at least), accuracy and power would decrease slightly with each successive blow. The balance between continued attacking and tactics was struck all but perfectly, and just when you thought there were no more genres left to straddle you'd come to a well-designed puzzle or a beautifully realised cut-scene that gave you more background for Ashley.

As for whether opting for on-screen speech bubbles over straight text or speech was a technical or a stylistic choice, it's irrelevant. The end result is as unique and charming today as it ever was. And that's before we even get onto the brilliant sound, the incredible replay value for an RPG and the sheer depth and customisation. Overwhelming, to say the least.

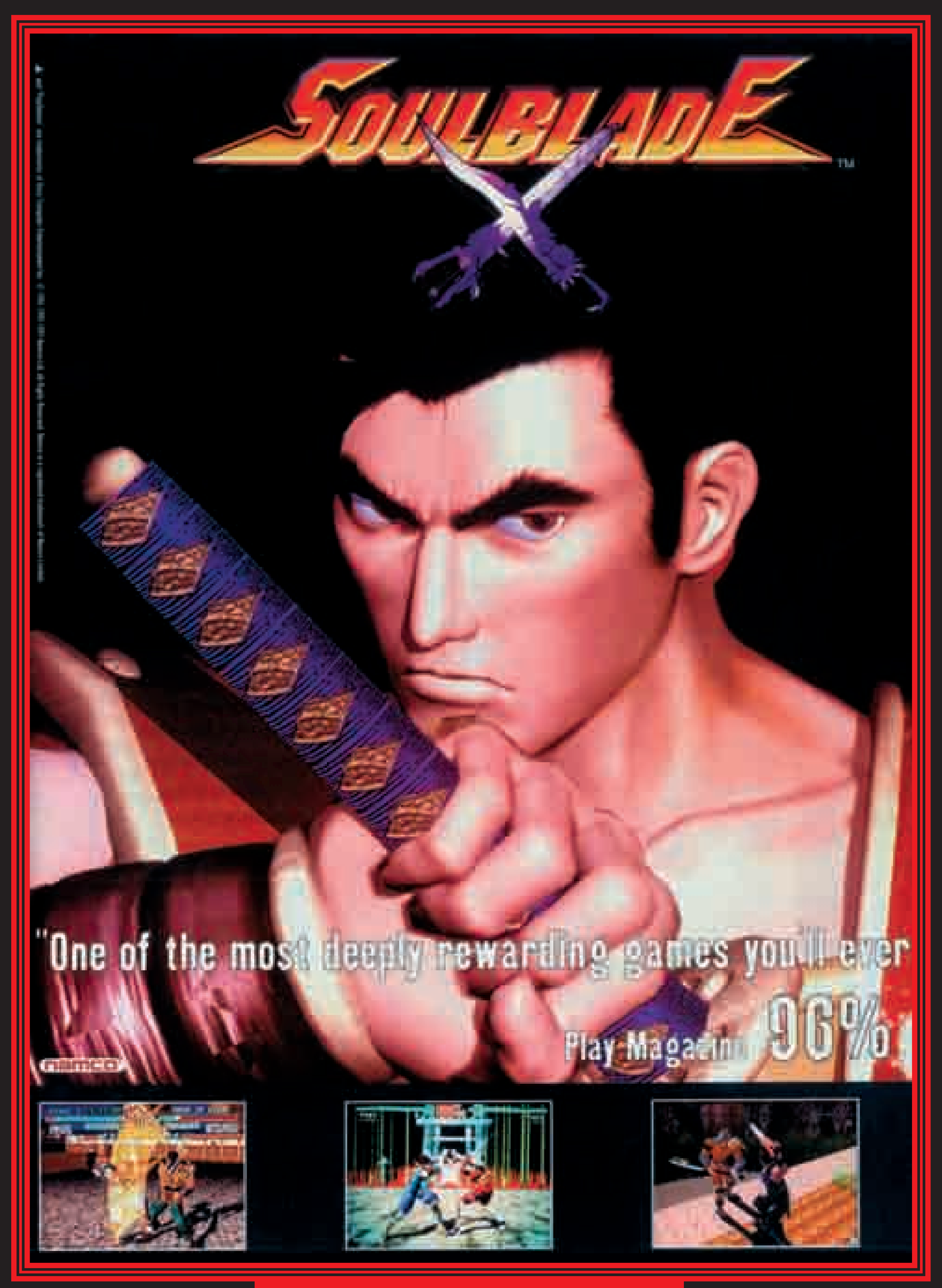
One of the love/hate elements of *Vagrant Story* was the strange yet rewarding weapon system. This encouraged the player to not only assemble their own equipment but also to develop it, making it more effective on certain types of creatures. To best do this, you'd have to use the weapon exclusively on enemies of a single category – if you wanted to create a dragon-slaying great sword, for example, you'd need to solely slay lizards and suchlike until the edge was conditioned for doing so.

While this was a great touch and made some of the tougher boss battles a fair bit easier, it did require a lot of work. Building up the weapon was one thing but having to go into the menu and switch between several of them whenever a new type of enemy appeared (consecutive rooms often held quite varied threats) became something of a chore. Regardless, creating an awesome weapon that didn't even fit on the screen and took down enemies in a single blow was a thrill almost unrivalled to this day.

Through the eyes of a gamer who understands and appreciates just what it attempts and what it offers, *Vagrant Story* remains one of Square's strongest games. Aesthetically and stylistically, there can be little denial of its prowess, and even new titles like *Final Fantasy XII* are using a similar visual style. It should come as little surprise that *Vagrant Story* is a favourite in RPG circles (it was the first PSone game to receive a perfect 40 from *Famitsu* magazine) but we sincerely hope people haven't become too caught up in a generation of polygon bonanzas and crazy peripherals to spread the love a little further. Go on – you owe it to yourself.

SMOOTH CRIMINAL

Forgive us as we stray a little from the retro path, but chuck the *Vagrant Story* disc in a PlayStation2 with the texture smoothing option turned on and get ready for a pleasant surprise. Much like *Parappa The Rapper* and *Metal Gear Solid*, Square's uber-hardcore RPG gets a noticeable makeover (more so than in most cases), and whether you're going back to *Vagrant Story* or playing it for the first time, you'll be treated to a rare treat from what is usually a fairly underwhelming feature of the PlayStation2 hardware.



SOUL BLADE (PlayStation) Namco, 1996 – UK Advertisement

PlayStation

WE CELEBRATE THE PLAYSTATION'S TENTH BIRTHDAY

Classic Machine

No, your eyes aren't deceiving you – this month's classic retro machine really is Sony's PlayStation. That's right, the one you can still buy brand new in many gaming stores. Sony's machine may well have helped change the face of gaming but it wasn't a smooth ride for the Japanese electronics giant; indeed, at one stage a Nintendo logo might have adorned the console's casing…

Eager to break into the console market Sony was set to collaborate with Nintendo on the abortive (and now infamous) CD-ROM drive for the Super Nintendo in 1998. It had previously entered into a deal with Philips to work on the CDi, but as conflict between the two companies continued to escalate Sony decided to concentrate on its new partnership instead. The newly christened 'Super Disc' would be able to play CD-ROMS and SNES cartridges, but a worried Nintendo wasn't happy with Sony becoming the sole licensor (thus gaining complete control over the console's material) and began to wonder what it had got itself into.

SPECIFICATIONS

CPU: R3000a 32-bit RISC (33.9MHz)
GRAPHICS: 3D Geometry Engine, with 2D rotation, transparency, fading and scaling and 3D texture mapping and shading
RAM: 2Mb, 1Mb Video RAM, 512Kb sound RAM, 512Kb operating system ROM, 32Kb CD-ROM buffer
SOUND: 16-bit 24-channel PCM (sampling frequency 44.1 KHz)
COLOURS: 16.7 million
RESOLUTION: 256x480 – 640x480
SPRITES: Virtually unlimited sprites on a line, virtually unlimited sprite images, rotation and scaling effects, transparency, priority, fading
POLYGONS: 360,000 per second
MEDIA: CD-ROM (2x speed)
MEMORY CARD: 128Kb

IN THE MAKING

When Sony revealed the renamed PlayStation at 1991's June CES show, Nintendo stunned its hardware partner and everyone else by announcing that it would no longer be dealing with Sony and would instead be collaborating on Philips' new machine. Nintendo's argument was that the Philips' technology was vastly superior to what Sony had to offer. Despite several lawsuits brought by Sony, Nintendo eventually escaped unscathed leaving a bruised and humiliated Sony to continue work on its own.

Although 200 prototypes of the first PlayStation (complete with the SNES cartridge port) were created in 1992, they never left the factory. Sony had a drastic rethink and decided instead to wait for the next-generation hardware cycle to begin. When it finally revealed the PlayStation-X (or PS-X as it was more commonly known) in 1993, the machine had gone through several drastic changes. The SNES cartridge port was now a thing of the past and Sony had also decided to move away from the originally planned multimedia format.

Apparently unimpressed with the likes of the 3DO and Philips CDi, Sony intended to concentrate on turning its PlayStation-X into a fully fledged games machine that would be complemented by enhanced 3D technology. Forget about the Super Nintendo's Mode 7; Sony's PlayStation-X would deliver proper 3D visuals. With designer Ken Kutaragi (who had also created the key audio chip for the SNES) hard at work on the PlayStation-X's custom hardware, Sony was confident that its new machine would be more than able to deliver the goods.

Of course, it's all very well having powerful hardware, but it's useless without strong software to back it up. Sony was well aware that it would need as much software support as possible and

A PIRATE'S FRIEND

Thanks to its CD-ROM-based medium, the PlayStation's software proved incredibly easy to copy, meaning pirates had a field day.

ABOUT FACE

Sony's decision to give its face buttons symbols rather than the traditional letters of other pads is still unique to home consoles.

BEST DEVICE EVER?

When Sony unveiled its PlayStation joypad it was quite unlike anything else on the market. Designed to exploit the PlayStation's 3D visuals, the new pad featured two additional shoulder buttons and was a fine example of ergonomic design.

As the years progressed, Sony created the Dualshock (a normal PlayStation pad complete with a built-in rumble effect) and also added two analogue sticks to the original design. Indeed, so popular was the joypad that Sony even released it for the PlayStation2 (although it now featured analogue buttons as well) and it's now as familiar to gamers as the actual machine.

STICK IT TO 'EM

Gamers took a while to get used to the new layout, but the addition of the analogue sticks made games like *Ape Escape* much better



PlayStation

proceeded to sign up a huge number of third-party developers to work on its new machine. Because of its enhanced 3D technology, Sony was soon enticing high-profile developers like Namco, Williams, Capcom and Konami and, as a result, many ports of hit arcade titles were signed up to Sony's new machine.

Not content with securing plenty of well-known third-party developers, Sony realised that it needed an in-house development team as well and immediately set about looking for suitable acquisitions. When the company announced it had bought the Liverpool-based Psygnosis for $48 million there were more than a few raised eyebrows. Although the developer had released classics like *Shadow Of The Beast*, *Lemmings* and *Blood Money* many were unconvinced by Sony's purchase. Titles like *WipEout*, *Destruction Derby* and *G-Police* soon proved the sceptics wrong, however, and Sony Interactive Entertainment (as it's now known) has proved itself to be a wise purchase.

ON THE MARKET

The PlayStation was released in Japan on 3 December 1994, exactly one week after Sega's Saturn (which had received a drastic overhaul after Sega found out about the PlayStation's 3D capabilities). Initially released for ¥37,000 (around £190) the PlayStation proved incredibly popular with the Japanese public, who were no doubt all queuing up to play the then very impressive looking *Ridge Racer*. Over 300,000 machines were sold in the first 30 days and while Sega claimed that the Saturn sold in greater numbers within the same time period, it was never actually proved.

Keen to build on its huge success in Japan, Sony quickly turned its attention to America. Thanks to an impressive display booth and an appearance by Michael Jackson, Sony had everyone talking about its PlayStation when it was shown off at the 1995 E3. When the PlayStation launched in the US on September 9 it had already sold a phenomenal one million machines in Japan (a target it had reached in six months), and while the American machine was selling at a rather high $299 (£160), the fact that it sold over 100,000 units in just two days suggested it was destined to enjoy the same success in America that it had in Japan.

September also saw the PlayStation launch in Europe and in the UK alone over 50,000 Sony consoles were shifted in just six weeks (despite being saddled with a hefty £299 price tag). *Tekken* became the first PlayStation title to sell over one million units and by January 1996, 34 titles were available for the machine in the UK. Thanks to extremely clever (and often controversial) marketing the PlayStation became a runaway success and by October 1996 Sony had shipped a staggering nine million units worldwide. In 1997 the first platinum budget titles were released in Japan and SquareSoft's *Final Fantasy VII* sold over 3.5 million units.

STILL GOING

Despite all the cynics saying otherwise, Sony's machine has become a phenomenal success and boasts a ten-year legacy that its competitors can only dream of. By November 2004 Sony's console was available in 120 different countries, had shipped over 100 million units, boasted over 7,300 games (with titles still appearing on a regular basis) and had enjoyed a redesign that made it smaller, sleeker and lighter. Regardless of whether you think the PlayStation is a retro machine, there can be little doubt that it has changed – and is still changing – the face of gaming.

ENTER PSONE

On July 7 2000, Sony revamped its PlayStation and gave the machine a smaller, much more compact design which would eventually replace the now clunky looking original. Despite being launched after the PlayStation2, and costing ¥15,000 (around £76), the new PSone became an instant hit and immediately won gamers over with its more aesthetically pleasing style. A portable screen was also released for the machine and continued clever marketing on behalf of Sony has seen PSone sales go from strength to strength.

Ironically, the machine is now geared towards the lower end of the market and has proved extremely successful with the younger market that was once associated with Nintendo. It's extremely unlikely that the PlayStation could last for another ten years, but if there's one thing we've learnt in the last decade, it's to never underestimate Sony.



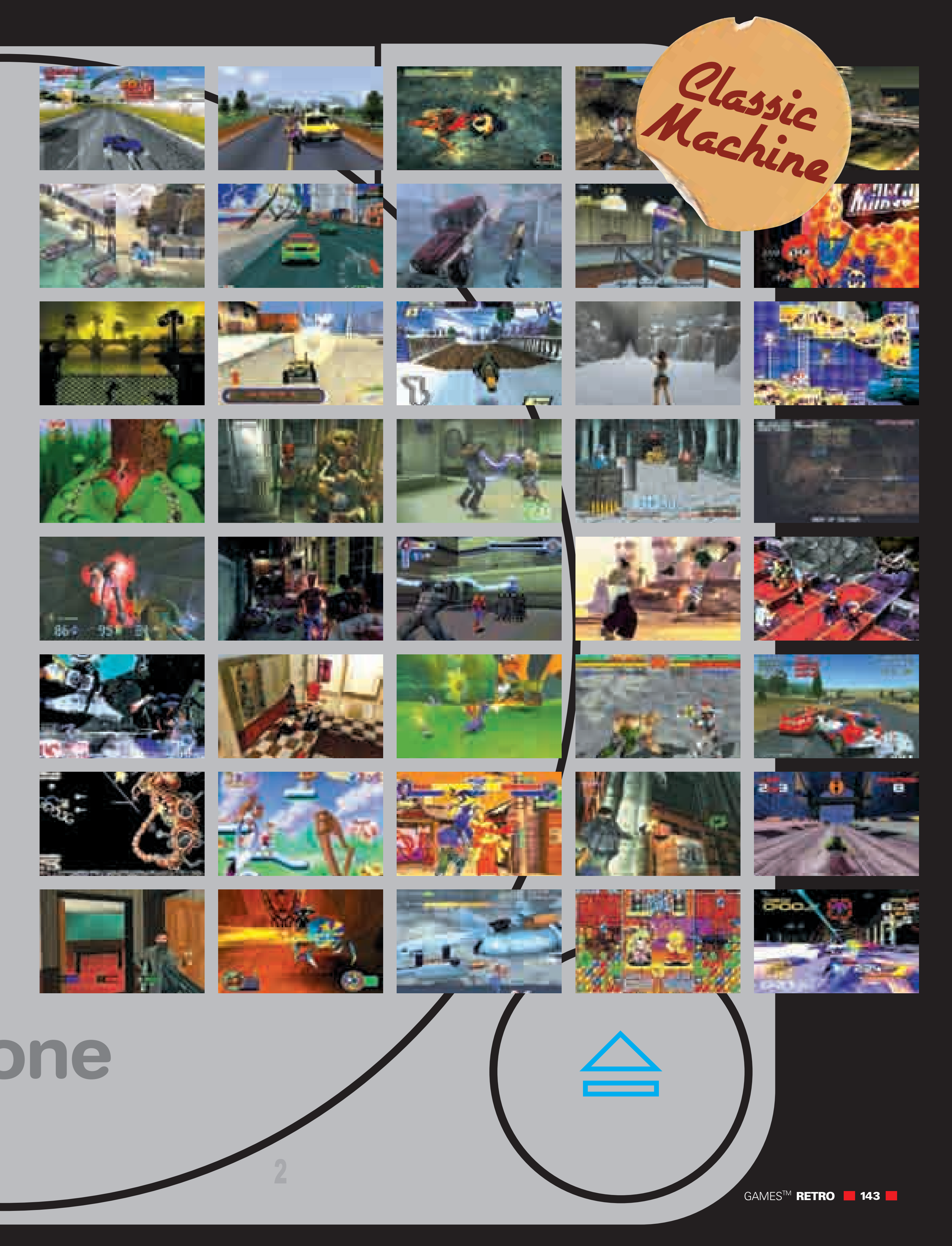


IN THE HUNT (THQ) PlayStation, 1996 – UK Advertisement



I/O
RESET

PS


Classic Machine
one
2



IT WAS ALWAYS GOING TO BE TRICKY CHOOSING SIX OF THE BEST PLAYSTATION GAMES, BUT WE'RE SURE THAT THE FOLLOWING DO SONY'S FIRST CONSOLE JUSTICE



WIPEOUT 2097

DEVELOPER: PSYGNOSIS RELEASE: 1996

As much as we loved the original *WipEout*, it was far from perfect. While it was insanely difficult in places and suffered from some rather dubious handling, it was the lack of longevity that really killed the fast-paced futuristic racer for us.

Psygnosis' sequel, however, got everything right and remains the jewel in the franchise's crown. Each craft handled superbly and the racing itself was faster and slicker than before. You no longer found yourself grinding to an annoying halt if you clipped the sides of the track, and the unresponsiveness of the original game was a distant memory. Track design was greatly enhanced over *WipEout* and the game's lifespan was increased thanks to a rewarding difficulty curve and much better structure.

WipEout may have successfully fused gaming with club culture, but the sequel took the (then) unlikely pairing to even further levels and delivered racy, pulsing tracks from respected DJs. Add to this some major graphical improvements – including moving scenery, less pop-up and a sickeningly fast sense of speed – and *WipEout 2097* aesthetically outclassed everything else around.



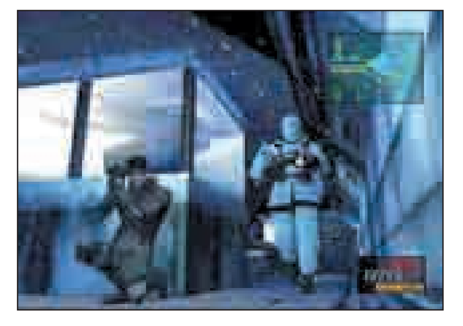
METAL GEAR SOLID

DEVELOPER: KONAMI RELEASE 1999

Hideo Kojima may have re-used plenty of ideas from his previous *Metal Gear* games, but it didn't stop *Metal Gear Solid* from being a defining moment in PlayStation history.

From its excellent cinematic opening to the climactic showdown that saw Snake and Liquid battling each other on Metal Gear Rex, Snake's first PlayStation adventure oozed quality and delivered an immersive experience that was unmatched by any other title of the same period. While the extended cut-scenes did eventually start to grate, the well-voiced dialogue, constantly twisting plot and excellent characterisation quickly made up for the long pauses between the actual game.

Metal Gear Solid's stealthy gameplay may have delivered plenty of thrills but it was the amount of neat touches that Kojima scattered throughout the game that really stuck with us. From Psycho Mantis revealing the contents of your memory card and causing your second joypad to ominously rumble, to outwitting guards by hiding in boxes, to using Diazepam to steady your nerves (and your sniper rifle) Kojima's epic constantly surprised and entertained. What a shame, then, that *Metal Gear Solid 2* and *Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes* weren't able to recapture the same magic.



RESIDENT EVIL 2

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM RELEASE 1998

If the recent adaptation of *Resident Evil 2* on the GameCube has taught us one thing, it's that Capcom's classic is as enjoyable today as it ever was. With the original *Resident Evil* proving to be such a huge hit, it was always obvious that a sequel was going to appear. Fortunately the wait wasn't too long and excited gamers once again found themselves trapped in the world of survival horror and loving every blood-drenched minute of it.

Rather than exploring a gothic mansion again, Capcom now allowed you to take to the streets (if only for a short time) before finally spending the majority of your adventure in Raccoon City's imposing police station. After being introduced to the two main playable characters (Leon S. Kennedy and Claire Redfield) via an impressive cut-scene, you soon found yourself once again overrun by all manner of gruesome undead and even nastier creatures who were all intent on ruining your chances of ever leaving the doomed city alive.

Although this was a lot more action-oriented than the first game, Capcom hadn't forgotten what had made *Resident Evil* so popular in the first place and added plenty of 'jump out of your skin' moments to the split storyline that changed depending on who you played as. Featuring some fantastic puzzles, riveting gameplay and genuinely unsettling moments, *Resident Evil 2* remains a classic example of the survival horror genre.



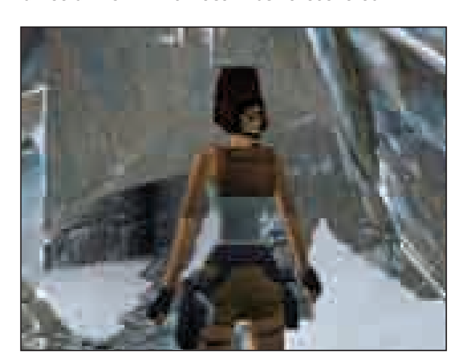
TOMB RAIDER

DEVELOPER: CORE RELEASE 1996

Okay, so Lara may have handled with all the finesse of a broken Tesco trolley, but there's little doubt that she opened the eyes of many a PlayStation owner when she first appeared in 1996.

Featuring glorious, expansive locations that just begged to be explored, the original *Tomb Raider* combined intriguing level design with a feisty female lead to create one of the most popular videogame characters ever (the game wasn't too bad either). With so many of the later *Tomb Raider* titles being incredibly poor, and after our own critical mauling of the original game in issue 3, it's easy to forget what a wonder *Tomb Raider* was when it first appeared. It's true that Lara has never been the easiest character to control (although this was more due to the digital controls than anything else) but few games of the time offered the same sense of scale and excitement of the unknown that *Tomb Raider* managed to create.

Each location was full of dangerous foes and deadly traps – crumbling floors, perilous spikes and watery deathtraps were just a few of the hazards you needed to bypass, and we haven't even mentioned the vicious animals that filled each location. As the series progressed the games became more focused on Lara's wardrobe than acceptable gameplay, and the franchise went into a freefall from which it still hasn't recovered.



GRAN TURISMO

DEVELOPER: POLYPHONY DIGITAL RELEASE: 1998

While we're still waiting for the mythical *Gran Turismo 4* to make an appearance its delay has given us the perfect chance to reacquaint ourselves with Polyphony Digital's first game in the series.

Namco may have impressed everyone at launch with its excellent (though now badly dated) port of *Ridge Racer*, but it was *Gran Turismo* that proved to be the real king of the road. Gorgeous looking replays, fantastic track design and a massive collection of cars all combined to create one of the most comprehensive racing games (or 'Real Driving Simulator's) around and it quickly became the benchmark by which all future racers were judged.



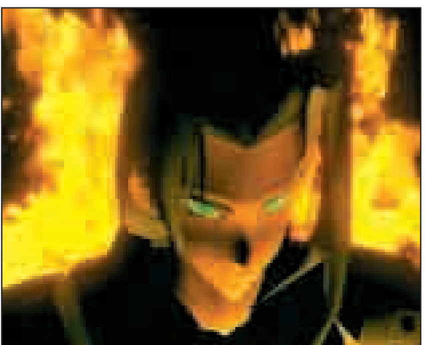


Unlike most of the arcade racers that were so popular at the time, *Gran Turismo* wasn't a title for those expecting to flawlessly complete a race on their first attempt. The realistic handling of each car meant that mastering the unique subtle nuances of every vehicle became as much of a challenge as actually racing them. Fortunately, the various licences required to open up later car classes were extremely well implemented and the game's carefully constructed learning curve meant that it opened up like nothing else before it. It may not have the same jaw-dropping looks that it was originally blessed with, but *Gran Turismo*'s fantastic gameplay is still blatantly obvious to anyone who's prepared to give it another spin.

FINAL FANTASY VII

DEVELOPER: SQUARESOFT RELEASE: 1997





Nintendo fanboys were up in arms when Squaresoft revealed that its renowned *Final Fantasy* franchise would be moving to Sony's PlayStation. When *Final Fantasy VII* arrived, though, it became clear that the developer had made the right choice for its beloved series.

The CD medium allowed Squaresoft to break the boundaries set by its previous games and in doing so it created one of the best-loved RPGs of all time. The most obvious difference was the series' move into 3D, but the impressive visuals (especially the outstanding turn-based fights) were only a small part of the game's charm. The *Final Fantasy* series has always been known for its involving plots, but the intricate tale that was spun for part *VII* was simply staggering and remains a firm fan favourite. Squaresoft's trump card, however, was in creating some of the most interesting and endearing characters to perhaps ever grace an RPG.

Cloud Strife's transformation from heartless mercenary to noble hero was compelling and even the hardest hearts have broken after witnessing the death of Aeris. Detailed cut-scenes propelled the story forward and were perfectly complemented by the stunning orchestral score by Nobuo Uematsu. Though it's now showing its age, *Final Fantasy VII* remains one of the greatest RPGs ever made.



Format: PlayStation
Release: 1997
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-House

Castlevania

We get our teeth into Konami's PSone masterpiece after seven years away from Dracula's castle

If you asked the man on the street to name his favourite PSone game, the same names would keep getting mentioned – *Final Fantasy VII, Gran Turismo, Tomb Raider* and the like. Then you'd have the less obvious choices. *Parappa The Rapper*, for instance, or perhaps *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*, a 32-bit update of the classic anti-bloodsucking series.

Konami's title used the hardware wonderfully to bring us visuals that were as beautifully animated as they were drawn and a soundtrack every bit as impressive. The game started at the end of *Vampire's Kiss* (*Dracula X* on the SNES) with the player taking charge of Richter Belmont as he slays the ridiculously evil Count. After this surprisingly early boss encounter, things started to get a little more – without wishing to sound too much like Avril Lavigne – complicated.

Symphony Of The Night took an already brilliant platform action franchise and somehow managed to inject it with a deep and extremely customisable RPG aspect. The two were blended so seamlessly that you had to wonder why no developer had even come close to this level of involvement before.

In the role of Alucard (see what they've done there?), your task was to reach your father, Dracula, at the heart of his castle to put a stop to his evildoing. Again. Where this may once have been a hike through six or seven levels of peril, Konami decided that the series' PSone debut should take place in one sprawling castle. To stop you from getting into too much danger early on, many of the doors were locked or otherwise sealed, only opening with specific keys, items or abilities, but it didn't take long for you to gain access to the deepest, darkest corners of Drac's imposing home.

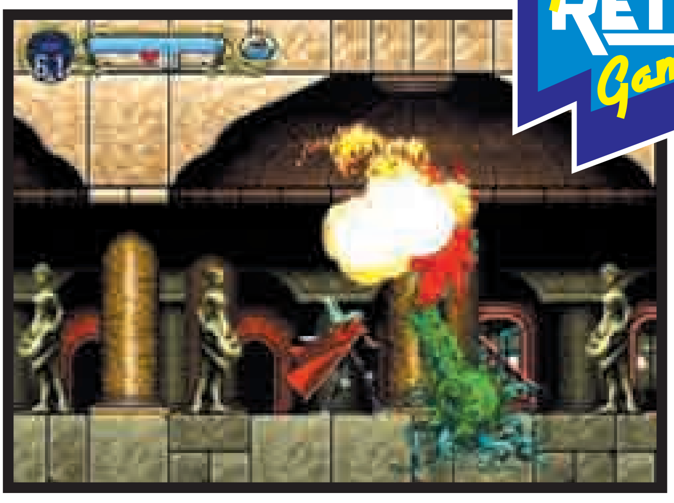
And even when you thought you'd reached the end, *Symphony Of The Night* flip-reversed you. Literally. To truly finish the game, you'd need to clear the whole of the first castle and then journey to a second, horizontally flipped version with even more hellish creatures and wonderful treasures to find (and, in the case of the nasties, do away with). Anyone who tells you they were expecting this from an already huge game should clearly never be trusted again.

FINISH HIM!

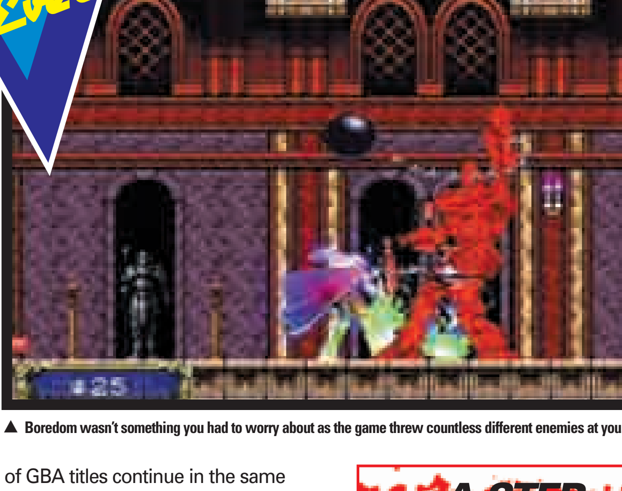
While most people are happy to load up a game save that's almost at 100 per cent completion, *Castlevania* fans have taken matters into their own hands. As we go to press, the most ardent fans have somehow racked up a ridiculous 393.4 per cent. How? A variety of techniques – from the confusingly dubbed Divekick Slide Double Heart Refresh Edge Tech to the downright silly Ceiling Flicker Heart Refresh and Jump Double Heart Refresh – allow you to register rooms outside the existing map as having been explored, taking the completion total above the usual maximum of 200.6 per cent. Intended longevity or well-exploited bug? The fact that people still play *Symphony Of The Night* today means that either way, Konami has won in the long run. Hop on over to www.gamefaqs.com if you want to learn more – this is far too complicated a process to reprint here.

▼ Like a belligerent drunk whose pint you've just spilt, Death vows to get his revenge. Possibly in the car park.





▲ Not one to do things by halves, Dracula's security measures were extreme. Though your fireballs were a help.



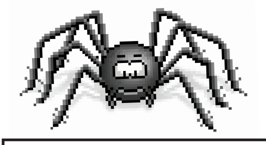
▲ Boredom wasn't something you had to worry about as the game threw countless different enemies at you.

Such was the freedom of the game that even by the time you'd seen both castles and several of the endings, you'd have a set of weapons, armour and accessories that suited your style of play. Carrying knives in both hands allowed for quick close-range flurries while the more potent weapons could unleash their own special attacks – a quick fireball motion on the D-pad (or similar action) would produce fireballs, dashes or combo attacks depending on your choice of pain-inducing implement. Further still, spells and special attacks gave you even more options in your quest to defeat Dracula, and again, combining skills with equipment led to some devastating set-ups.

Perhaps the most enjoyable thing about the game was one of the things RPG players fear most – level grinding. Even after seeing one of the four endings on offer (plus an extra one if you completed it with Richter, a bonus character unlocked by finishing the game), you could easily trek from one side of the castle to the other and see not only new enemies, equipment and areas but also gain a few levels in the process. The sheer variety of foes and locations meant that getting bored was not an option, and with exploration so well rewarded with treasure and skill it's always been hard to put down the pad.

But, alas, even the greatest games of all time aren't perfect. Voice acting walked a fine line between overwhelmingly hammy and simply dreadful (usually falling closer to the latter) and the game was a little on the easy side, especially with the help of a few extra levels and some of the more powerful weapons that can be found. But despite these problems – if you can even call them that – this was a game that, alongside *Metal Gear Solid*, proved that 16-bit hero Konami could still cut it as the millennium drew closer.

But even with the genius of *Symphony Of The Night* committed to the archives of history, Konami has taken the series in directions that no fan can really condone. While the trio of GBA titles continue in the same platform RPG vein, the N64 and PlayStation2 games (and the cancelled Dreamcast version) took the largely unwelcome step of embracing the third dimension, something that made capturing the same kind of precision and style a nigh-on impossible feat. And with every passing year, a concoction of rumours and wishfully misinterpreted quotes from Konami builds up hope of a 2D revival only to have it shot down by a string of no-shows and 'other' games.

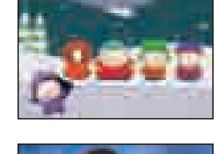


But if we're alone in thinking that a 2.5D *Castlevania* game (or even a hi-res sprite-based affair) would be an error of judgment, we'll bite our own damn necks. And you don't want that, do you, Konami?

A STEP TOO FAR?

Considering the worldwide interest in *Castlevania*, it's odd that the Saturn version of *Symphony Of The Night* never made it out of Japan. Unwilling to rest on its laurels, Konami created an even more intense adventure for Saturn owners, which saw it adding two new locations while also allowing you to start playing as Alucard, Richter or the Saturn-exclusive Maria. Armed with a triple jump and some nifty spell attacks, Maria greatly enhanced *Symphony Of The Night*'s already impressive lifespan. Sadly, the conversion featured more slowdown than its PlayStation counterpart and less impressive effects. Though the two new levels were a nice bonus, neither were very interesting and the package felt rather rushed. We still prefer the PlayStation version.

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF 1997



CARTOON HEROES:

Animation stepped out of the playground and into the gutter this year. *South Park* gave us four foul-mouthed children who went on to tackle almost every taboo imaginable. Lovely.

FASHION VICTIM:



Don't like the idea of permanently defacing your body with a tattoo? Henna tattoos took off in a big way, made even more popular by Madonna a year later.



ON THE RADIO:

With the bubblegum pop of Hanson, The Verve's overrated *Urban Hymns*, Green Day's *Nimrod* and Radiohead's *OK Computer*, 1997 was a good year for tunes.

AT THE MOVIES:



Before the *Lord Of The Rings* trilogy made films over three hours long acceptable, James Cameron's *Titanic* was tragic in every possible sense. We blame Celine Dion.



ON THE BOX:

This year saw Sarah Michelle Gellar rise to stardom in *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, a show that would run for seven seasons before they ran out of stake gags and things to kill.

JOURNEY SECOND

PAL TITLES

Strider 2

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
UK PRICE: £15-£20

Fairly hard to get hold of outside of eBay, *Strider 2* contains not only the rather cracking modern makeover but also the original arcade game as well, meaning it's great value for money. This was a rightfully well-received title at the time amongst *Strider* fans but like so many games here it sadly got ignored in favour of more complex looking 3D titles.



Super Pang Collection

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
UK PRICE: £5-£10

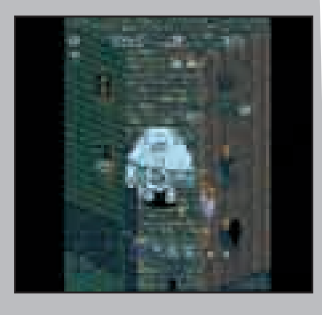
This compilation of the *Pang* games is very hard to find in the wild, although it is available new for £34.99, so if you're a fan it's worth the extra expenditure. For those not attracted to this *Asteroids* derivative the *Super Pang Collection* is one of those titles that's nice to find cheap and then trade or sell off at a profit.



Mobile Light Force

DEVELOPER: PSIKYO
UK PRICE: £5-£10

Let's get one thing straight – this is cute Japanese shooter *Gunbird* that's just been renamed and given a cover that has absolutely nothing to do with the actual game (badly hand-drawn Charlie's Angels wannabes). It's a title that's strictly for shooter fans as the difficulty is pretty high and the conversion (although inferior to the Saturn version) remains playable, yet limited.



Rapid Reload

(AKA Gunners Heaven in Japan)

DEVELOPER: SONY
UK PRICE: £5-£10

A *Gunstar Heroes* clone that flounders thanks to its shocking lack of a two-player mode. It's pretty hard to get hold of nowadays due to the fact that it was one of the very earliest titles on the PSone and if you'd just stumped up £300 on a new console you didn't want a *Contra*/*Gunstar Heroes* imitator that looked at home on the Mega Drive. Not an expensive game, but *Gunstar Heroes* is so much better.



Capcom Generations

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
UK PRICE: £20-£35

Capcom Japan released the five volumes of *Generations* at about £30 each time. Capcom Europe rather generously bundled four of the five volumes (leaving the *Street Fighter* volume for a separate release) into one collection for £20. While prices now fluctuate, even at £40 it would be great value for money as it contains gems such as *1942*, *Commando*, *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* and *Mercs*.



Strikers 1945 Part II

DEVELOPER: PSIKYO
UK PRICE: £5-£8

Classic shooting action that's an outright bargain in the UK and pretty cheap in the US as well (where it's known as *Strikers 1945*). This is still widely available in most high-street game stores in the UK and is another example of a classic Psikyo title released at an excellent price, which was then ignored by the masses. Fans of Capcom's *1942* shooters would be well advised to grab this one as soon as possible.



TO THE DIMENSION

WE GOES THROUGH OUR PLAYSTATION COLLECTION TO UNCOVER THOSE CLASSIC 2D TITLES THAT YOU REALLY SHOULD OWN

'Story: Jonathan Dyton'

Collecting games is about making you, the collector, happy. Sometimes you're drawn towards the packaging, other times the game's exclusivity is a factor, while for some it's just about the actual game. It seems strange, then, that a machine like the PSone that's identified so strongly with 3D titles probably now has more 2D releases than the Saturn (a console well known for its two-dimensional games). Dozens of 2D releases are still hitting the PSone budget market, joining many other overlooked 2D classics, so there's never been a better time to start picking them up.

If you've fancied dipping your toes in collecting 2D titles but have been put off by the inaccessibility or price of the Saturn's 2D library, then the PSone market is definitely for you. New collectors can easily pick up PlayStation games that were formerly Japanese-exclusive releases for Sega's machine at a fraction of their previous cost. Add to this the fact that many titles are now available in the US and the market opens up even further.

So why are publishers raiding the Japanese back catalogue? Well, not only does the PlayStation still has a massive installed user base, but there's also the PS2's backwards compatibility. Take a ten-year old shooter, for example, change some text, write some new instructions, release it at £10 and you'll probably sell a lot of copies by making it an impulse buy.

And the attraction doesn't end there – some of these titles have the potential to be in huge demand in years to come, as they fit the profile of games released at the tail end of a machine's life that will almost certainly be ignored by the gamers of today who are simply looking forward to the latest PS2 release.

Re-releasing classic PSone titles is not only an activity of the European and US publishers. In Japan, the likes of the Major Wave and PSone Books series have started to feature 2D shooters and arcade conversions such as *Crazy Climber* and *Moon Cresta* on a regular basis. With online retailers like Lik-Sang and Play-Asia willing to ship these brand new titles to the UK, there's no excuse to pay through the nose for great retro titles.

Collecting titles on the PSone is a good learning curve as it allows the beginner to start off with cheap European releases before moving onto the rarer PAL titles that are often found on auction sites. Once you've gained experience in the PAL market, the world of inexpensive imports opens up and then it's just a case of chasing those remaining expensive titles needed to finish off your collection.

To get you started, let's look at 20 games that should appeal to everyone, from the beginner wondering if 2D gaming can still be enjoyable alongside today's hyper-realistic games, to the experienced collector who fancies some classic sprite-on-sprite action without too much effort.

Raiden Project

DEVELOPER: OCEAN
UK PRICE: £15-£30

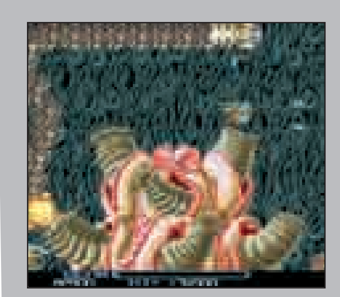
Raiden Project is an arcade-perfect conversion of *Raiden I* and *II*. It was also one of the first home conversions we saw that offered a vertical monitor mode alongside the usual scaling down of the playfield to fit on a horizontal screen. It's not a bad game but subsequent shooters on both the Saturn and PSone somewhat left it in their wake. The game isn't too hard to find at the moment – expect to pay between £15 and £30 depending on condition.



R-Types

DEVELOPER: IREM
UK PRICE: £10-£20

A simply superb pairing of *R-Type 1* and *R-Type 2* that deserves to be in everyone's collection. Your only choice should be what region you choose to purchase this on. *R-Types* currently retails for between £10-£20 but expect a minted copy if you're paying top price for it – amazingly, there are still new copies in circulation. With *R-Type Final* currently available for the PlayStation2, there's never been a better time to see where the series began.



Metal Slug X

DEVELOPER: SNK
UK PRICE: £15-£20

Metal Slug X is an excellent conversion of the Neo Geo title, but it does suffer from a fair amount of multi-load. Fortunately, it's now around £20 in the UK (even cheaper in the US), so you can count the money you've saved over the AES version in between scenes. The original *Metal Slug* was released for the PSone but only appeared in the US and Japan.



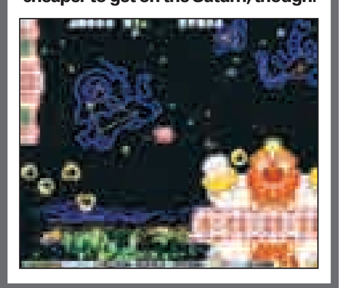
JOURNEY TO THE SECOND DIMENSION

PAL TITLES [CONT]

Parodius

DEVELOPER: PSIKYO
UK PRICE: £20-£25

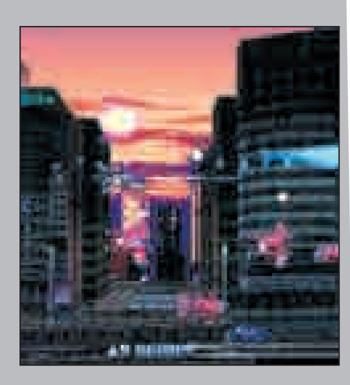
Pretty hard to find on PAL now, *Parodius* combines *Parodius Da!* (AKA *Parodius 1*) and *Gokujyo Parodius* in one very nice collection. These are the first two games in the series and are still great fun to play. Though they're not the hardest examples of their genre, they're definitely two of the most enjoyable side-scrolling shooters on the PSone and even for £20-£25 represent great value for money. It's easier and cheaper to get on the Saturn, though.



R-Type Delta

DEVELOPER: IREM
UK PRICE: £10-£12

Huge bosses, beautiful backdrops and fantastic music separate *R-Type Delta* from previous outings; though the difficulty level and the frustration factor do rear their heads. This is increasingly hard to find on the high street but is available in the usual haunts for under £12 and is worth it if you're able to track one down.



Philosoma

DEVELOPER: SONY
UK PRICE: £5-£10

Not a bad little shooter from the early days of the PSone – it has some decent 2D action interwoven with 3D levels reminiscent of Sega's *Space Harrier*. It's fairly hard to get hold of now, but pretty cheap – nice if you can find one. It's one of the few US PlayStation titles that retailed in a tall, Saturn-style box.

BUBBLING UNDER ON PAL

CT SPECIAL FORCES TRILOGY: £5-10
STRIKE FORCE HYDRA: £5-8
SUPER DROP ZONE: £5
NAMCO MUSEUM COLLECTION 1-5: £15-30 each
RAYCRISIS: £15
X2: NO RELIEF: £10



IMPORTS

Metal Slug

DEVELOPER: PSIKYO
IMPORT PRICE: £18

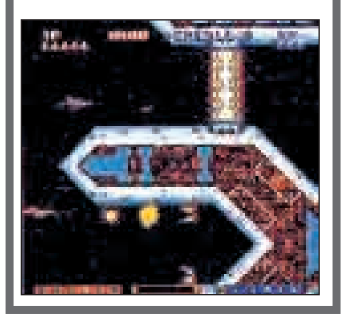
Metal Slug isn't a bad conversion; it's just not as good as the Saturn one as it features much more slowdown. Fortunately, the PlayStation release tends to be cheaper and doesn't require a RAM cart to play. Now on a budget release this is currently available as a Japanese import for under £20 shipped – that's around half the price of the Saturn version.



Gradius Gaiden

DEVELOPER: KONAMI
IMPORT PRICE: £20

Far more worthy of your time than the *Gradius* deluxe pack, *Gradius Gaiden* is a classic side shooter that retains the spirit and style of the original games but turns everything up as loud as it can go with a deeply dark atmosphere. This is also available as a budget re-release in Japan, meaning that *Gradius Gaiden* is a priority purchase for those with the right machine.



Einhander

DEVELOPER: SQUARE
IMPORT PRICE: £15-£20

Considered one of the best 2D shooters of the post 16-bit era *Einhander* is a beautiful game with great atmosphere and gameplay. Little touches such as the weapon recoil show the effort Square put into this game. Terrific music, stunning looks, fine gameplay and, thanks to the dollar rate, yours for under £25.

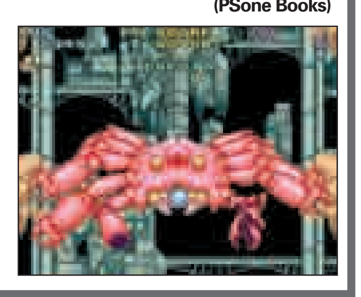


Detana Twinbee Yahoo! Deluxe Pack

(PSone Books)

DEVELOPER: KONAMI
IMPORT PRICE: £8-£15

Dirt cheap on the Saturn in Japan (and we mean dirt cheap, it's under £8 in Japan) this is yet another budget re-release and contains the *Detana!! Twinbee* and *Twinbee Yahoo!* titles in one great, value-for-money package. If you're a fan of the *Parodius* games, this is surely a must-have.



MORE IMPORTS

Sol Divide

DEVELOPER: PSIKYO
IMPORT PRICE: £8

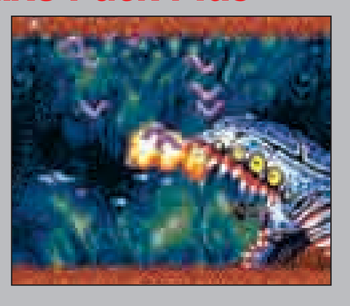
Another Psikyo re-release put out by Xsgames in the US. It's only $9.99 new but frequently sells for less. The Saturn version used to go for considerably more, and while prices have softened this is well worth picking up. It's a decent side-scrolling shooter that's bound to please fans of the genre.



Salamander Deluxe Pack Plus

DEVELOPER: KONAMI
IMPORT PRICE: £25

In bringing together *Salamander, Life Force* and *Salamander 2* in one collection Konami hit the nail right on the head. Two arcade-perfect classics and the fantastic looking *Salamander 2* combine to make an essential purchase for hardcore fans of the series and shoot-'em-ups in general.



Thunderforce V Perfect Systems

DEVELOPER: TECHNOSOFT/WORKING DESIGNS
IMPORT PRICE: £25

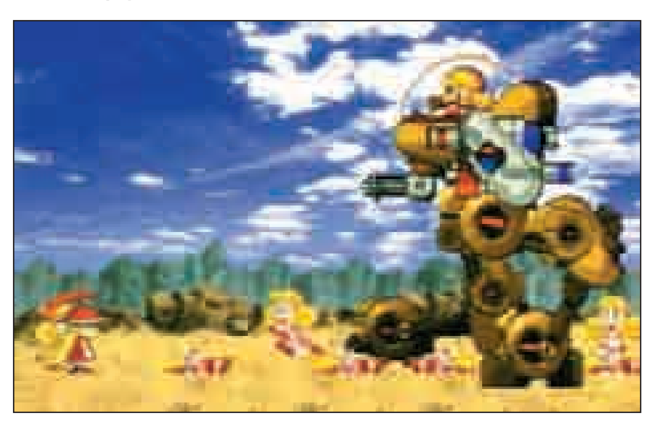
Thunderforce V is not a game for the sideways-shooter newcomer as it's tough and frustrating – but then suddenly it all seems to click, moving through tolerable to very enjoyable. No real new ground is broken but the old turf gets given a serious going over and the game contains plenty of nods to the original games. Definitely a title for those who know what they want and know what they'll get out of a shooter.



Silhouette Mirage

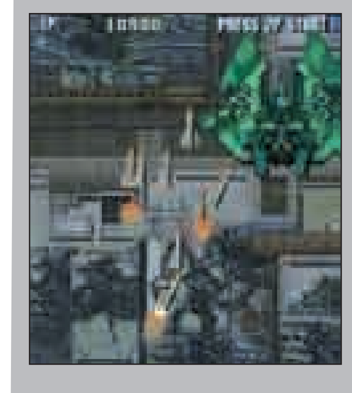
DEVELOPER: TREASURE/WORKING DESIGNS
IMPORT PRICE: £15-£25

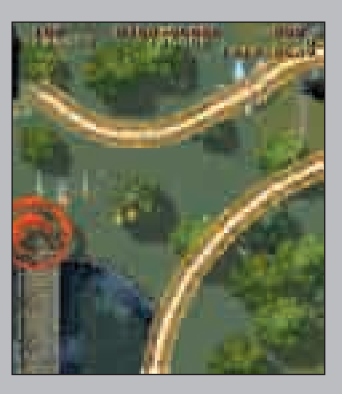
Not the greatest Treasure title by a long shot, it's certainly not worth the inflated price it currently retails for. The Saturn version was never that great in the first place but is generally considered an interesting and fun title with a few twists. Working Designs' conversion ramps up the difficulty level and (some say) squeezes most of the fun out. Make sure you play first and don't over pay.



OR TRY THESE...

NICHIBUTSUI ARCADE CLASSICS: £40
MOON CRESTA and CRAZY CLIMBER: available for £15 each as re-releases
SOUKYU-GURENTAI: £15
SHIENRYU: £15
NIGHT RAID: £40
SONIC WINGS SPECIAL: £20
RAIDEN DX: £20
TOAPLAN SHOOTING BATTLE VOL.1: £10
GAIA SEED: £20-£25
HARMFUL PARK: £20
NAMCO MUSEUM 1-5 PLUS ENCORE: £180 in total including display case.
NAMCO COLLECTION 1 & 2: £15-£20 each
HYPER CRAZY CLIMBER: £15







Platinum Productions may no longer be around, but in the Eighties it was responsible for some of the Spectrum's greatest conversions. We caught up with the company's co-founder, David Anderson, to find out how four schoolboys took the gaming world by storm

DAVID ANDERSON

interviewed by **DARRAN JONES**

Most 14-year-olds would be happy with a paper round to earn a bit of cash. Or perhaps a bit of dog walking or car washing. Not David Anderson. When he was just out of short trousers he got together with some friends and started his own development house creating top-quality Spectrum conversions. At 14 they were publishing their own titles, by 17 they were industry veterans…

Born in Edinburgh in 1967, Anderson's formative gaming experiences were with the likes of *Phoenix* in his local arcade. But when home computers came along, his interest shifted and his savings went on a ZX81. "Our school already had a ZX80 but we all waited for the ZX81 to come out and bought one of those instead. We soon started to type in basic programs and experiment with what was possible on the machine." The 'we' in question were Anderson and fellow computer fans Ian Morrison, Alan Laird and Bobby Dickie.

The four teenagers soon became bored with the games they were buying through classified ads ("people sent you the listing and you simply typed it in," Anderson explains), so they decided to take matters into their own hands. "We started to run our own line ads in the back of magazines and would send people photocopied listings and instructions for gameplay," says Anderson. "We quickly realised that Basic was useless and that we had to learn Assembly language; this all happened within a four-month period. By spring 1982 we were developing Assembly language games and other graphics demos for the ZX81. My arithmetic tells me that we were 14 when we started publishing our own titles."

Pooling their resources, the friends shared their knowledge and essentially taught themselves. Armed with their new skills and a couple of their own games, they decided to break into the industry; something they found a lot easier than they had expected. "We got into the industry at the very beginning," says Anderson. "It was easy to buy line ads in magazines and it was easy to go to the local resource centre and photocopy the relevant materials. The rest was simply cashing cheques and stuffing envelopes."

It wasn't enough, though, and after their early taste of success, Anderson knew that the four friends would have to create a more professional image in order to entice the bigger publishers. "Platinum Productions was a vehicle to get us in the door at Ocean Software in 1984," he explains. "We wanted to adopt a name that would get us attention, so we created the Platinum brand because it communicated 'expensive' and 'valuable'. I called Jon Woods [managing director] at Ocean and left a message asking that he call back David Anderson from Platinum Productions. He called back to say, 'Who the heck are Platinum Productions?' Two weeks later we had a deal to code *Beach Head* for the launch of the US Gold label later that year at the PCW exhibition in London."

It sounds like the very definition of an overnight success, and Anderson realises that his big break was a painless experience. "Thinking back, it ought to have been very hard for us to break into the industry," he admits. "Jon Woods once told me that it took two sets of skills to be successful – a set required to get in to his office and a set to stay there. There were many people with the skill set to stay there – the technical skill set – but few with the entrepreneurial skill set to get in the door in the first place."

YOUNG GUNS

The videogame industry has been criticised in the past for abusing programmers' skills and cheating companies out of royalties, but despite their relatively young ages, Anderson and friends were never troubled by such inconveniences. Setting themselves up with a big law firm in Glasgow, Anderson is sure that Platinum Productions always had the best representation possible (even if they didn't always negotiate the best deals). Not only



that, but entering the industry at such a young age wasn't unheard of.

"We made good money – much better than many others in the business at that time," he recalls. "Everyone was young, it wasn't just us – even the publishing houses were owned by people in the 19- to 22-year-old bracket. Ocean was an exception, though, as the founders weren't actually games people. Their previous business had been renting props to film production companies; they were pure entrepreneurs – we were games guys. If you were 16 or 17 you started a development house. If you were 19 or older and had some family money then you started a publishing house. Recently people remember the internet bubble and young kids starting firms like Napster; in the early Eighties, games was a similar boom but there was less money in it as the market was much smaller."

With Platinum Productions having a publishing deal, it quickly set to work on a series of conversions for the Spectrum that set the young team apart from its peers. Its conversions of the *Beach Head* games were of a particularly high standard and Platinum Productions soon found itself being handed some very big licences, most notably *Zaxxon*, *Tapper* and *Rambo*.

Although pleased with the chance to work on such high-profile titles, Anderson was perfectly aware that the Spectrum wouldn't always be up to the task at hand. "If ever there was a poisoned chalice it was *Zaxxon*," Anderson remembers. "It was prestigious to be asked to do it, but very hard to do on the Spectrum with the technology we had at the time. Still, I really liked the animation work we did on the explosions and it represented the beginnings of our 00 technique of mapping behaviour and data structures together as objects."

Tapper also presented challenges thanks to the vast amount of sprites involved and its fast-paced, constant multi-channel music. "On the Spectrum constant music was a killer on

8-BIT GLORY

Despite the introduction of the 16-bit generation of computers, Platinum Productions continued to work on conversions for the Spectrum and other 8-bit machines, mainly due to Ocean not wanting the schoolboy programmers to move away from the still lucrative market. "We were considered one of their better development groups and too valuable to move on to 16-bit early whilst the market was small," says Anderson. "We did eventually move to 16-bit. Ian did a lot more work in 16-bit. The one game I did develop for Electronic Arts was loosely based on the movie *Inner Space*. Unfortunately, it got canned along with a host of other games that Electronic Arts opted not to publish in 1990."

SOFTOGRAPHY

In just three years, David Anderson and his Platinum Production colleagues worked on many Spectrum conversions

- Brain Damage, Silversoft, Spectrum 1983
- Colour Clash, Romik Software, Spectrum..........1983
- Exterminator, Romik Software, Spectrum 1983
- Shark Attack, Romik Software, Spectrum 1983
- Beach Head 1, US Gold, Spectrum.....................1984
- Beach Head 2, US Gold, Spectrum.....................1984
- Galactic Trooper, Romik Software, Spectrum....1984
- Lode Runner, Software Projects, Spectrum 1984
- Lode Runner [New Game Set], Software Projects, Spectrum 1984
- The Dam Busters, US Gold, Spectrum................1985
- Raid Over Moscow, US Gold, Spectrum 1985
- Rambo, Ocean Software, Spectrum, ...1985

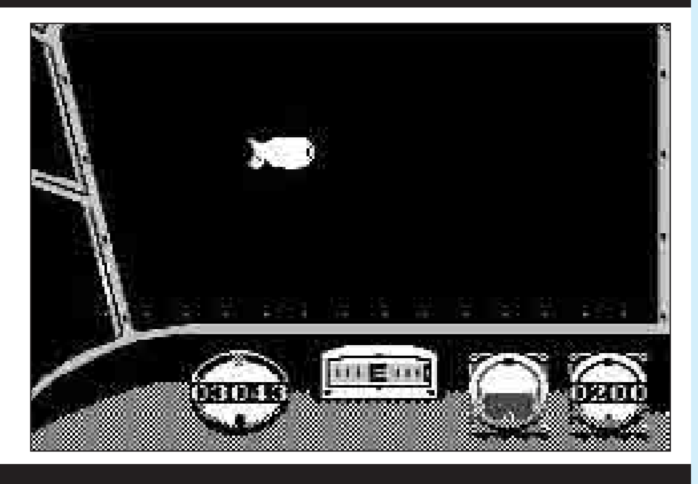


▲ *Rambo* created some headaches for Anderson as he tried to meet a Christmas deadline, but at least tiny 8-bit Sly Stallone was more convincing than the one in the movies.



DAVID ANDERSON

▼ *Dam Busters* let you have your very own Barnes Wallis moment in your living room.



processor power because the programmer literally has to flip the bit on the speaker at the correct frequency of oscillation to make a musical note – it requires some very careful coding," explains Anderson.

Perhaps one of the most interesting titles Anderson worked on was *Rambo*. Unlike past games, *Rambo* was a collaborative project and Anderson found himself working with the likes of Paul Owens and Jonathan 'Joffa' Smith.

For once, Anderson saw his graphics being canned, as Ocean felt that his original look wasn't cartoonish enough (the visuals were eventually supplied by Smith). Even with this small setback, Anderson and the rest of the team were never in any doubt as to what shape *Rambo* would eventually take. "The basic idea was to recreate the *Commando* arcade game concepts but set it in the plot of the actual movie," Anderson explains. "We actually re-used the source code from *Beach Head II* with some updates to make it faster and smoother. Then it was simply a case of developing the data for the objects and replacing the behavioural code. The whole process took us nine weeks."

Rambo also proved to be one of the team's toughest deadlines and with its Christmas deadline drawing ever closer, Platinum Productions was starting to feel the pressure. "Ocean had booked out production time at a tape duplication factory in Birmingham and I can remember having to fly to Manchester in early December to do some finishing touches on the code and then being driven to the factory by Paul Owens," recalls Anderson.

"The game had to be duplicated that day or it was going to miss the last shelf-stocking day before Christmas. Jon Woods was there and the whole factory was waiting for me to give them the master. Jon asked me just to play the whole game through and win it to demonstrate that it was all working and bug free. This was the most nerve-racking game of my life. One issue with many of my games was that there was no slack to code backdoors or cheats; I literally had to play it all the way through and win it before the tape duplication began. Luckily we made it in to the shops on time."

PLAYING THE FAME GAME

Rambo may have seemed like a massive licence for such a young development house, but with three Crash Smashes in a row it was obvious that Platinum Productions was something special. While the awards were more than justified, the fact that Platinum managed its own PR also helped. Anderson essentially became the front man of the team and was soon doing everything he could to ensure that everyone knew who Platinum Productions was.

"We worked directly with *Crash* magazine in terms of bringing to their attention that the same team had developed all three games," he recalls. "The publisher's PR people didn't really help us at all. I just don't think they were particularly aware of what was happening at the developer level. The market was so fast-moving in those days and so many titles were being published – it's not like today

▼ Platinum Productions' conversions of the *Beach Head* titles led to prestigious licence-based work.



DECISIONS, DECISIONS…

With dozens of games behind him, a burnt-out Anderson temporarily left the games industry in the mid-Eighties in order to go to university. Upon his return, however, he found himself making a difficult decision that resulted in him leaving the industry for good. "I took a break and came back to it in 1989 developing a game for the Atari ST and Amiga. By this time I realised my real talent was in the technical side of gaming. My future could have been as a 3D graphics engine or physics engine specialist in a larger games house like Electronic Arts. In the early Nineties this would have meant moving to America to achieve it. It didn't really make sense for me, as I was ready to move on and do commercial products."

where games cost millions of dollars and take one or more years to develop."

While the triple whammy of Crash Smashes were initially seen as business as usual, Anderson now realises just what an amazing achievement it actually was to earn such accolades. "It was only possible because of our high programming standards in terms of quality and re-usability," he explains. "As we weren't trained software engineers, code re-use was what we needed to be successful, to produce a new game every month."

DIFF'RENT STROKES

Even though they found great success with Platinum Productions, the friends (who were later joined by Robin Muir and Mark Craig) eventually parted ways when they all chose different career and education paths. Some went to university, others remained in the industry, though not necessarily for long. "I remember telling friends that I wanted to be in a less cyclical, less fickle market," Anderson recalls. "You could code a great 3D engine and be technically superior, but if the journalists didn't like the gameplay then you were sunk. The stakes were simply too big by 1990. Games were taking teams of six to 12 people one year to create, so I moved on to other things."

Anderson no longer works in the games industry – "I'm really out of touch with games nowadays, but what I see is an industry dominated by the Americans and Japanese and that the main European publishers seem to be foreign owned," he says. However, he does still works with computers, and is currently with Microsoft in Seattle. Although he's lost touch with the rest of Platinum Productions since leaving university, Anderson is still on good terms with Alan Laird. "We have a lot in common," he says. "We both have Japanese wives and bilingual children with two, or even three nationalities. I understand that Ian Morrison still works in the games business and is based in LA but I'm no longer in contact with him."

Despite his current success (he's considered a leader in his field of agile software development), Anderson still harbours fond memories of his time at Platinum and is delighted at the resurgence of retro gaming, even if he does feel that there are a lot of legal issues to be ironed out. "I know I have a stack of contract paperwork in my parents' attic which says all the rights in the code for the games I wrote reverted to me two years after the publisher ceased actively marketing them," he explains.

"I'd like to see old games distributed for free. I've no interest in making any money from them and I don't believe that the publishers have the right to be selling them without my permission. Something ought to be done about it but it's a lifetime away for me now and I'm not about to take a leadership position in fighting the battle."

So for now, Anderson is content with his memories, but one thing's for sure. "I'll still be in the software business for many years to come…" he says.

SOFTOGRAPHY CONT.



- Tapper, US Gold, Spectrum 1985
- World Series Baseball, Imagine Software, Spectrum 1985
- World Series Basketball, Imagine Software, Spectrum 1985
- Zaxxon, US Gold, Spectrum 1985
- Kung-Fu Master, US Gold, Spectrum 1986
- Super Soccer, Imagine Software Ltd, Spectrum 1986



▲ *World Series Baseball* brought you all the action of the game without having to pay for warm beer and sit through the American national anthem. "Look! It's Enrico Pallazzo!"



Share your views about old-school gaming

First Contact
If you're into retro gaming and you've got something to share with the world, why not write to us at: games™ Retro, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 2JS Or you can email: gamestm@paragon.co.uk

PARADROID ANDROID

Dear games™
Okay, here's the thing – nowadays everyone loves retro games and consoles because they represent the 'golden age' of videogaming. I myself have nothing but fond memories of playing the greatest games ever, and I know I'll have nothing but a moment's glimpse of this in the modern games of today.

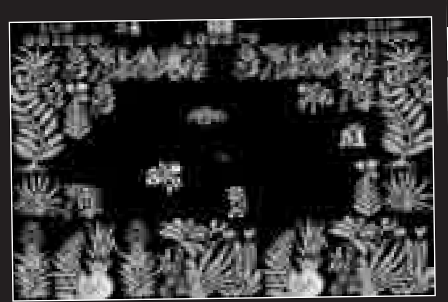
However, the purpose of this letter was not to rant on about the usual boring debate about the progress of videogaming, but to discuss a long forgotten classic that no one seems to have mentioned in your magazine, namely Graftgold's *Paradroid*. I owned this game on my C64 and it was (in my book anyway) the best game I've ever played. It was 100 per cent additive, incredibly complex and got satisfyingly harder the longer you played it. If it's at all possible, could you dedicate a section of your retro magazine to this classic game?
Christopher McGuicken, Northern Ireland

You're quite right, *Paradroid* was indeed an excellent game. We've already given it a brief mention in issue 10 when we did a profile of Graftgold, but there's always the chance we'll look at it again in greater detail in the future.

ULTIMATE WARRIOR

Dear games™
I've always been a huge fan of Ultimate Play The Game as it made some of the games that I cut my gaming teeth on. With this in mind, will its titles ever appear on a current or next-generation console like the Xbox as some sort of compilation? I'm sure there are hundreds, nay thousands, of gamers who would buy such a compilation should it ever actually appear. Surely it wouldn't be that expensive to bung all those classics on one disc, would it?
Ryan Summers, via email

We're huge fans of Ultimate's back catalogue ourselves and it would be fantastic to be able to play titles like *Sabre Wulf*, *Knight Lore* and *Gun Fright* again. Although arcade compilations regularly turn up, we're not too sure how a selection of Spectrum and C64 games would fare. If it ever happens, though, we'll be first to let you know (and buy it).



Careful – it's an 8-bit, monochrome jungle out there…

IT'SA MARIO MARVEL

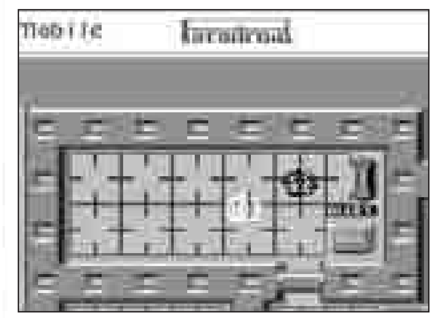
Dear games™
Have a look at this fantastic video at www.ebaumsworld.com/smb3beat-r.html. Watch in amazement as the player completes *Super Mario Bros 3* in a ridiculously good 11 minutes – no cheats and he doesn't die once. This isn't gaming, this is art.
Alex Bradshaw, via email

Cheers for the link, Alex, but after the last Mario video proved to be a hoax we're a little sceptical about this one as well. If the owner wants to come into the office and give us a demonstration, though, we'll be happy to watch it.

BIG SHAT

Dear games™
How on earth can you describe the Jaguar as a classic machine [issue 23]? It's one of the worst looking consoles that I've ever seen, has a ridiculously poor amount of games available for it and many of them were absolute rubbish. The only decent title was *Tempest 2000* and even that looks naff by today's standards. Crikey, you'll be covering the Amstrad GX400 next…
Craig Blake, Romsey

Sure, the Jaguar may not have been the most popular console around, but to say that *Tempest 2000* looks naff? Looks aren't everything and it still plays much better than many games around today. Don't worry, though, it's highly unlikely that we'll ever be covering the GX400 – well, not until we've dug it out of the loft…



We looked at it once, maybe we'll look at it again – that's *Paradroid*.

AD ATTACK

Dear games™
I just wanted to say that the *Mortal Kombat* ad in issue 24 is one of the funniest things I've ever seen. I don't know if I feel more sorry for the two idiots dressed up as Kano and Raiden, or those two little kids with their fashionable white ankle socks. If you can dig up more painfully funny ads I may be forced to subscribe.
Timothy Blake, via email

Glad you liked the advert. We're constantly scouring old magazines and if we find something that makes us giggle we try to print it somewhere. Like the *Barbarian II* poster starring Maria Whittaker and 'TV's Wolf from *Gladiators*. Always gets a laugh. Oh, and the subscriptions are on page 170, just in case there's anything funny in this issue…



How about 'So crap it's funny'? The poster, that is, not the game.

STAR LETTER 

GOING STRAIGHT

Dear games™

While I was debating over which SNES game to play next, I had a sudden pang of guilt about the fact that I was playing my favourite retro games illegally via a disc drive connected to my SNES.

It got me thinking about how game companies could make money by selling retro games to end-users. I don't mean those compilation packs that are already out there on the market, I'm talking about legal downloads, very much the same way that MP3 tracks are now available. Game manufacturers could easily sell their retro games at only a couple of quid a game over the internet, enabling retro fans to play them on their PC, or via a legal hardware add-on for a now defunct console. Perhaps Nintendo could release the iQue outside China and maybe even release a SNES version of it.

The whole retro gaming emulation scene is where MP3 was a couple of years back, and I think making them available via legal download will make some revenue for the games companies who are sitting on a potential gold mine of games. Admittedly, this isn't going to stop file-sharing and ROM downloads but it is legit.

Mad Gerald, via email

It's a great idea and Microsoft is already planning a similar project for Xbox Live. Xbox Live Arcade will enable games to download old arcade classics like *Ms. Pac-Man* and *Galaga* (for a price, of course) and then keep them on their hard drives. Whether it catches on remains to be seen, but we're interested.



So how long is it before ROMs are available the same way as paid-for MP3s? And will you be willing to pay for them?

IT'S A MYSTERY

Dear games™

Have you ever heard of the Plustron TVG 2000CP? My friend has had this particular model since new and bought it for £24.95 in 1978 (he still has the receipt). Despite its age it's still in full working order and has loads of old favourites such as a *Pong* rip-off and the tennis/ football/squash variations that go with it – there's also a lightgun and two compatible games.

All the games are in colour (or to quote the instructions "Full colour identification"), and there are three (yes, three) sounds. I have had a good search on the internet and found no information on this particular machine. So, if you know anything please let me know.

Gary Chaplin, via email

We're sorry but we've drawn a complete blank on this one too. The best we can offer is that we think it might have been made by Plustronics, a British electronics firm. Other than that, nothing. Can anyone out there shed some light on this mystery machine?

BEST CONSOLE EVER?

Dear games™

Every month I buy your magazine and each time I turn to the retro section to find that you still haven't covered Sega's Dreamcast. In my opinion it's the greatest console ever made and has a great range of classic titles available for it. *Crazy Taxi*, *Resident Evil: Code Veronica*, *Rez*, *Super Street Fighter III: Third Strike* and *Shenmue II* are all incredible and deserve a mention in your great mag.

Alex Ricketts

One of the biggest problems is how gamers still view Sega's machine. While the games you've mentioned are all fantastic, they're all currently available on the PS2, Xbox and GameCube, so can't really be considered retro titles. Rest assured, the Dreamcast is on its way, we just have to look at it slightly differently than other retro machines.



Retro Contact is sponsored by Joystick Junkies. Each month's Star Letter will win its author an item of retro gaming clothing of their choice worth up to £20.



C·L·A·S·S·I·C C·O·N·S·O·L·E

BUYERS GUIDE QUICK REFERENCE

BUYERS GUIDE

It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers are out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£60
Goldstar 3DO	£50-60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£50
Acorn Electron	£40

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£20
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25
Amstrad GX4000	£50

ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£30 (wooden models tend to cost more)
Atari ST	£40 (with software)
Atari Lynx	£15
Atari Jaguar	£20-30

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic 20	£15-20
Commodore 64	£25-35 (varies according to model)
Commodore Amiga	£35-40 (varies according to model)
Commodore CDTV	£50-60
C64GS	£50 (becoming more sought-after)
Commodore CD32	£35

MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£20-250
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£175-200
JAMMA compatible cabinets	£100-350 (depending on model)
Supergun	£150-200 (varies according to model)

NEC

PC Engine	£70-80
Turbo Grafx-16	£50-60
Turbo Duo	£115-220
PC Engine GT	£100-200
Super Grafx	£200-300

NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£15-50 (depending on title)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£10
Game Boy Color	£15
Super Nintendo	£20-25
Virtual Boy	£75-100
Nintendo 64	£20-25

SEGA

Master System	£20
Mega Drive	£20-25
Game Gear	£10-25
Mega CD	£40-60
Sega 32X	£30
Sega Nomad	£75-150
Saturn	£20-35
Dreamcast	£20-40

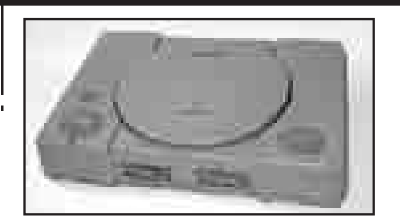
SINCLAIR

Sinclair ZX-81	£40
ZX Spectrum 48K	£40-50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX Spectrum +3	£40

SNK

Neo Geo MVS Single Slot (Arcade system)	£70 (prices for multi-slots are higher)
Neo Geo AES (home system)	£175-225
Neo Geo CD	£125-175
Neo Geo CDZ	£150-175
Neo Geo Pocket Color	£30-50

MACHINE OF THE MONTH



- **NAME:** PlayStation
- **PRICE:** PlayStation: £15
  PSone: £22
- **THREE OF THE BEST:**
  Final Fantasy VII (est price £8)
  Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night (est price £60)
  WipEout 2097 (est price £10)
- Is it a retro console? Who cares? We prefer the sleeker redesign, but both are the price of a second-hand game.

HOW TO USE GAMES TRADING MARKET

SELLING

Simply send the following to: gtm@paragon.co.uk
■ Your name ■ Your age (you must be over 18)
■ Your home address and telephone number (this will not be given out) ■ Your email address ■ The item(s) you wish to sell (no more than five per month) ■ The condition of the item(s) ■ How much you want for the item(s)
Each item will be listed along with your region.

BUYING

Mail the following details to: gtm@paragon.co.uk
■ Your name ■ Your age (you must be over 18)
■ Your home address and telephone number (this will not be given out) ■ Your email address ■ The reference number for the item you want. Your email address will be passed to the seller, who will contact you to close the deal and arrange payment and delivery. This runs on a first come, first served basis.

WANTED

Contact us in the same way as above stating what items you want and any preferences on condition or price.

GTM RULES AND SMALL PRINT

This service is for private sellers, not dealers. Retro items only (nothing post-Dreamcast). No Mega Drive *FIFA* games – everyone has at least two. Highbury Entertainment cannot accept responsibility for items lost or broken in the post.

BUY & SELL your retro games with games™

GAMES TRADING MARKET

Searching for an elusive copy of Radiant Silvergun? Want to sell that pile of Spectrum games taking up space around the house? Then check out GTM, the most authentic retro sales column in the world.

FOR SALE

LOT 90 – Neo-Geo AES with two joysticks, memory card and 11 games including *SNK Vs Capcom Chaos, Metal Slug 3* and 4, *Fatal Fury Special* and *Alpha Mission* (email for details). £1,000 ONO (will consider splitting). Shane at shamus1roks@yahoo.co.uk

LOT 93 – Games: *Daytona USA* (Saturn, PAL), excellent condition, £2. *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* (Amiga, PAL), good condition, £1.50. *Zero Wing* (Mega Drive, PAL), good condition, £7. *Golden Axe 3* (Mega Drive, NTSC), excellent condition, £27. *Soukyugurentai* (Saturn, black cover, NTSC), excellent condition, £28. garethcrowley@hotmail.com

LOT 102 – *Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap*, Master System. Great condition, has instructions. £12.

LOT 109 – NES with seven games including *Super Mario Bros 3, The Legend Of Zelda, Solstice* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. All games unboxed but in decent condition. £50. Dublin.

LOT 111 – Commodore 64C Family and Hollywood Pack. Has one joystick plus ten games, including *Rambo, Top Gun, Trivial Pursuits and The Krypton Factor* (full list via email). All fully boxed, hardly used and in very good condition. £80 ONO. Contact S Hockley on hockleyhc@btinternet.com

LOT 112 – Two Amiga games on one disk, *Breaker* and *Alutia's Jewels*, only £5 (incl. P&P). Contact Andrew Burton on aliensrcooluk@yahoo.co.uk or 07765 791896.

LOT 113 – Sega bundle. PAL Mega CD (boxed, no AC adaptor), two Mega Drives with 15 games and four controllers, one Saturn (boxed) with eight games, Master System with six games and gun. Not all games boxed, but all items in perfect condition. £200 (will split). Kieran Lyons: monkiki@eircom.net, or contact (35391) 751464

LOT 115 – Boxed Mega Drive II that's been switched to play games at 60Hz. With over 25 games including *Mortal Kombat II, Castlevania, Gynoug, Castle Of Illusion, Dynamite Heady, Comix Zone* and *Jungle Strike*. All games boxed with instructions. £90. Bournemouth.

LOT 116 – *Robo Aleste* for PAL Mega CD. Top shooter in superb condition. £20. Poole.

LOT 117 – *Panzer Dragoon Saga* for PAL Saturn. Doesn't have outer sleeve, but is in very good condition. £100 ONO. Birmingham.

LOT 118 – Atari Lynx (old version) with *California Games, Rampart* and *Gauntlet 3*. Battery cover missing, but otherwise the machine is in great condition. £40.

FOR SALE – LOT 119

PAL Dreamcast with 12 titles

Including *Crazy Taxi, Soul Calibur, Shenmue, Dead Or Alive 2, House Of The Dead 2, Jet Set Radio* and *Capcom Vs SNK*. Comes with two joypads, a lightgun and a VMU. Only £60. Liverpool.

Best Buy

WANTED

WANTED 36 – C64 and any games published by either Hewson or 21st Century Entertainment. Manchester.

WANTED 41 – Sega 32X. Must be in good working order. Will pay up to £40. Cambridgeshire.

WANTED 49 - *Sonic 1, 2* and *3*, and *Sonic & Knuckles*. Would prefer boxes and manuals. Will pay £5 each. iantennie@hotmail.com

WANTED 52 – *Jumping Flash 2* for PSone. Will pay up to £30 for copy in good condition. West Midlands.

WANTED 56 – Manuals for *Dragon Warrior Monsters* (GB), *Warhammer, Warhammer Dark Omen* (PS) and *Ecco The Dolphin* (MD). Linda@activemail.co.uk

WANTED 58 – *Shining Force 3* (PAL Saturn). Can swap for *NiGHTs: Into Dreams + NiGHTs: Christmas Edition*. Call Thomas Davies, 01244 329996.

WANTED 59 – *R-Type Delta* for PSone. Will pay reasonable price if good condition. Tim, 07961 840764.

WANTED 60 – *Radiant Silvergun* for Sega Saturn. Will pay up to £80. Sunderland.

WANTED 61 – Nintendo Game & Watch titles. Will pay reasonable prices. Must be mint, boxed. Bath.

WANTED 62 – *Megalomania* and *Streets Of Rage 2* for PAL Mega Drive. Ideally boxed and with manuals. Contact Paul at paulpossart@hotmail.com

WANTED 63 – PC Engine Turbo Duo in decent condition. Must be RGB modded, boxed and in good condition. I'd also like a reasonable selection of CD games and HuCards to go with it. Taunton.

GAMES™ RETRO CLASSIFIEDS

Send to: **GTM, games™, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 2JS or email gtm@paragon.co.uk**

Name..

Address..

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....Postcode..........................

Email..

Tick classified heading

❑ **FOR SALE** ❑ **WANTED**

Write your advertisement here, one word per box, and only include your name, address, phone number and/or email address below if you want them printed.

THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION

THIS MONTH'S COLLECTOR OF ALL THINGS RETRO IS CHRIS FOULGER, A PRODUCT CO-ORDINATOR FOR A VIDEOGAME ACCESSORIES MANUFACTURER IN BEDFORDSHIRE. BE PREPARED TO BE DUMBFOUNDED BY HIS SEGA COLLECTION…

Q) How long have you been collecting?
I started going car booting in the late Nineties and quickly realised that I could get games that were previously over £40 for 50p. However, the majority of my collection is made from games that I bought when the machines were still current, so a lot of the Sega Master System games have been with me for about 15 years.

Q) How did your interest in collecting come about?
Gaming has been one of my hobbies for many years and then became my career. I guess I collect because of very cheap games at car boot sales and access to previously unavailable titles that I found on internet auction sites.

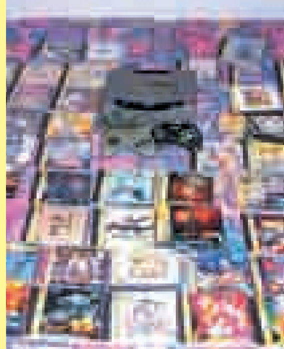
Q) What's your most prized possession?
My Japanese Sega Mark III console. It's the forerunner of the Sega Master System and something that was never available in the UK when it was released in Japan. It's a white console with Seventies retro stylings and a catalogue of (for the time) great conversions of Sega games.

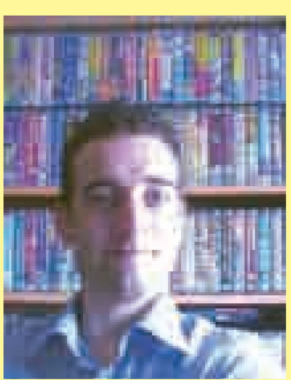
Q) What sources do you use and have you ever found a real bargain?
As I've mentioned, car boot sales and auction sites are the best places to find games. However, good relationships with other collectors are invaluable because we can find games for each other and trade. The real way to get a great bargain other than luck is to support the consoles before they become retro collectables. A case in point being that I only paid £40 for the Saturn game *Radiant Silvergun* in 1998.

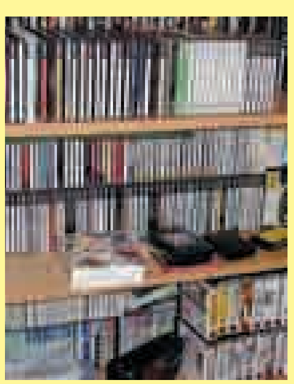
Q) What's the most highly desirable item that you haven't tracked down yet?
There are several things that I am still looking for including the Sega Laseractive, the FM sound unit for the Sega Mark III and *Tetris* for the Mega Drive, but something I'd really like to own one day would be a *Daytona USA* arcade machine.

Q) What does your family think of your collecting habits?
Adults seem to be surprised (not impressed) at how many games I own and they don't really understand why I would have so many. Children like to be able to play all these great games because to them, only other children own games and for an adult to have that many games is something they're not used to.

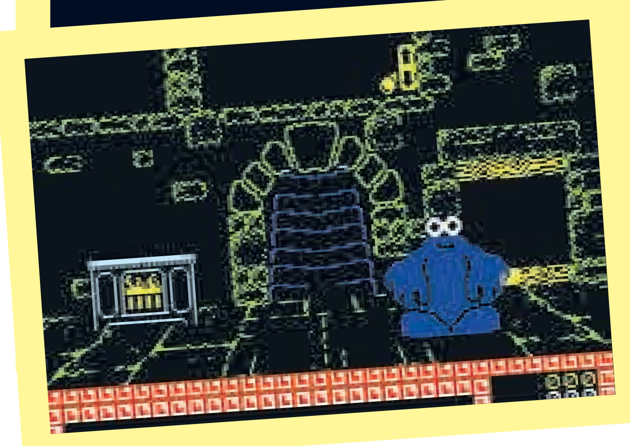
Q) What's the most money you've ever spent on a single item?
Apart from Neo Geo games that often cost £200 as the norm, the most I've ever spent on a normal home game would have been £95 for *Panorama Cotton* for the Japanese Mega Drive – and that was a lot cheaper than its usual collector value!


The console of a man. The duvet cover of a lady.


Sega – meet your biggest fan.


Go on – there must be a SNES game in there…

NEXT MONTH IN RETRO



We've had a hard time tracking him down, but next month's issue of Retro will feature a new exclusive interview with Don Priestly, creator of Spectrum classics like Flunky, Popeye and Trapdoor.

See you then!

ON SALE 30 DEC


eMag

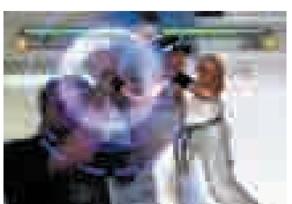
ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-



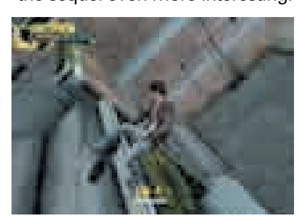
SEGA SUPERSTARS

NiGHTs, Sonic, Samba De Amigo and more, all on a single disc? That'll be Sega's new EyeToy effort, then. While it's not quite as extensive as Sony's latest release, the games featured have enough of the traditional Sega flavour to keep us happy for a while.



TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 2

Yes, so we know that every new *Tony Hawk's* game is declared the best one yet – this time, though, it seems Neversoft has learnt some lessons from *Underground* and made real improvements to make the sequel even more interesting.



EYETOY: PLAY 2

Sega Superstars certainly comes close to being the greatest thing out for the EyeToy so far, but there's no denying that *EyeToy: Play 2*'s wider range of games and options makes it the essential purchase for anyone who enjoys a round of digital parlour games.





PLAYSTATION2

Manufacturer Sony
UK Launch Date
24 November 2000
Media
4.75-inch DVD Disc
Current Price £104.99

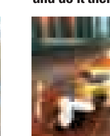
The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. Thanks to Sony's reputation, though, it's still the most popular console around – a trend that will no doubt continue now that the remodelled, one-quarter-size PStwo is available.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

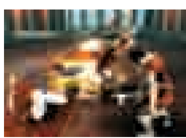
Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix	Music games have never needed as much skill as this
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House	A fine example of adventuring; well worth the wait
Burnout 3: Takedown	EA Games	Criterion Studios	EA takes the arcade racing genre to new heights
Dark Chronicle	Sony	In-House	In-depth RPGs don't come much bigger than this
Devil May Cry	Capcom	In-House	The original is still the best by a long shot
Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness	Atlus	Nippon Ichi	Like your RPGs practically endless? Then this is for you
Grand Theft Auto:: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	Bigger, badder, better – a great GTA experience
Gregory Horror Show	Capcom	In-House	Bizarre, twisted and yet oh-so enjoyable
Hitman: Contracts	Eidos	Io Interactive	Silent but deadly – a real killer of a game
Ico	SCEE	In-House	Possibly the most beautiful game ever made
Katamari Damacy IMPORT	Namco	In-House	One of the quirkiest action puzzle games around
NBA Street 2	Electronic Arts	EA Sports Big	The daddy of basketball games – no contest
Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time	Ubisoft	In-House	Ubisoft shows how to make a proper retro update
Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	In-House	The only football game worth owning, period.
Rez	Sega	UGA	Deceptively simple – draws you in before you know it
Silent Hill 2	Konami	In-House	The high point of Konami's survival horror series
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The *Tony Hawk's* of the snowboarding world
Star Ocean: Till The End Of Time	Ubisoft	Square Enix	Square proves that there's life beyond *Final Fantasy*
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	Neversoft	Better? Again? How does Neversoft keep doing it?
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	In-House	By far the deepest 3D fighting game around today

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Star Ocean: TTEOT
Offers something a little different from the usual Square Enix titles, with plenty of adventuring to go round.



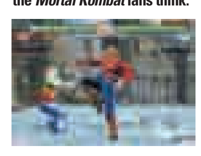
Prince Of Persia: SOT
Haven't managed to conquer the Prince's first revival? You'd better hurry up and do it then…



Devil May Cry
Recent trailers for the third game in the series have had us drooling over the original again, and with just cause too.



Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution
Still one of the finest examples of the beat-'em-up genre around, no matter what the *Mortal Kombat* fans think.



Ico
Play it. Love it. Play it again. It's a never-ending experience that only a game like *Ico* could create.









EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…



XBOX

Manufacturer Microsoft
UK Launch Date
13 March 2002
Media
4.75-inch DVD Disc
Current Price £99.99

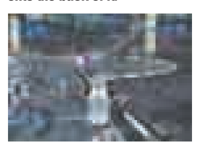
Despite a slow start, the Xbox has swiftly become one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded, although the Xbox is far more accessible to gamers than most PCs. The 'special edition' Crystal console is now widely available from stores across the country.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Burnout 3: Takedown	EA Games	Criterion Studios	The game that redefines the arcade racing genre
Chronicles Of Riddick: Butcher Bay	Vivendi Universal	Starbreeze Studios	A fine example of great gameplay and top-notch graphics
Def Jam: Fight For New York	Electronic Arts	Aki Corporation	Ultra-violent fighting has never looked so good
Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	Ion Storm	Freestyle adventuring with a decent first-person twist
Fable	Microsoft	Big Blue Box	A special breed of RPG – well worth experiencing
Grand Theft Auto: Double Pack	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	The best versions of *GTA III* and *Vice City*, without a doubt
Halo 2	Microsoft	Bungie	The Xbox's most popular game just got even better
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	Smilebit	Cel-shading at its very best and a soundtrack to die for
Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	BioWare	One of the best *Star Wars* games ever made
Ninja Gaiden	Microsoft	Tecmo	Damn tough, but a great example of style and gameplay
OutRun 2	Sega	Sumo Digital	Stunning reproduction of a great arcade game
Panzer Dragoon Orta	Sega	In-House	The classic series continues in well-presented style
Project Gotham Racing 2	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations	As comprehensive an online racer as you're ever likely to find
Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo	Scarier than anything else out there today
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway	In-House	An enjoyable and solid psychic blasting romp
Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	Ubisoft	In-House	An essential update to the hugely popular Live game
Rallisport Challenge 2	Microsoft	Digital Illusions	Does everything you'd want from a rally game and more
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft	In-House	Even better than the original, with a storming Live mode
Star Wars Battlefront	Activision	Pandemic Studios	A great game first, a great Star Wars game second
Thief: Deadly Shadows	Eidos	Ion Storm	*Splinter Cell* for the Middle Ages? Sounds good to us…

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

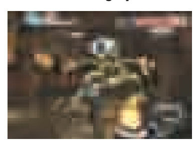
Star Wars Battlefront
'Be' a Stormtrooper – a childhood dream come true, with a decent game hooked onto the back of it.



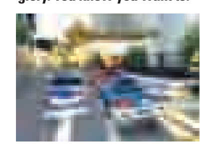
OutRun 2
A refinement of the original arcade game with more than enough bells and whistles to keep Xbox gamers happy.



Psi-Ops: TMC
As the ace up Midway's sleeve, *Psi-Ops* managed to surprise us all with some rather solid and gory action.



Burnout 3: Takedown
We're waiting online for your challenge, you know – try to take us on for a taste of glory. You know you want to.



GTA: Double Pack
Who needs *San Andreas*? Not Xbox owners, so long as they've got Rockstar's twin pack spinning in the drive.







WORMS: FORTS UNDER SIEGE

We'll certainly admit that compared to the unintuitive failings of *Worms 3D*, *Forts Under Siege* makes better use of the 3D environment. That said, it's still not a patch on the old 2D version – give us that any day.



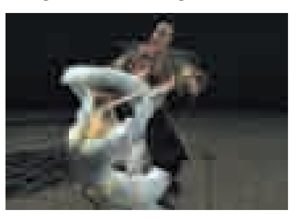
X-MEN LEGENDS

Maybe it's just us, but shouldn't superheroes be slightly more, well, super than how *X-Men Legends* shows them? Not that it's a bad game, you understand, but even so we'd hoped for something a bit more than just a rather generic action RPG.



MORTAL KOMBAT: DECEPTION

And to think this is the most popular *Mortal Kombat* game yet. Is there something we're missing? Or has the public's taste for a decent beat-'em-up that requires skill been lost under a deluge of blood and gore?



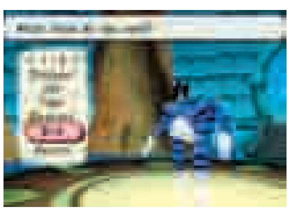
ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-



AMAZING ISLAND

It looks like a Sega game, it sounds like a Sega game, but strangely… well, it just isn't. Call us old-fashioned, but we like our games to have some gameplay in them, whereas this seems to have none. Strangely, there's no UK release date. Hmm.



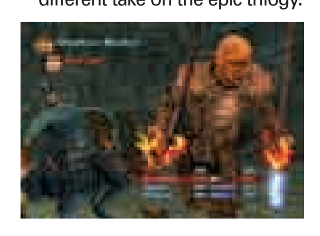
WARIO WARE: MEGA PARTY GAME$

Given that this has been out for a few months now, it's testament to *Wario Ware*'s quality that we're still making time for it now. For us, four-player mini-game action doesn't get much better, and for less than £20 it's a real bargain.



LORD OF THE RINGS: THE THIRD AGE

While perhaps not quite the meld of *Lord Of The Rings* and *Final Fantasy* that we might have hoped for, EA's turn-based battling RPG is at least good fun for those who fancy seeing a different take on the epic trilogy.





GAMECUBE

Manufacturer Nintendo
UK Launch Date 3 May 2002
Media 3-inch Optical Disc
Current Price £79.99

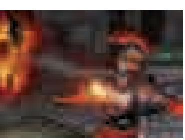
Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth a look. While third-party support is dwindling, it's the first-party releases that really offer some quality gaming. Nintendo still makes some of the finest games ever, so missing out isn't really an option.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

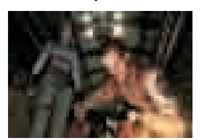
Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	In-House	The only game to keep us playing for a full year
Eternal Darkness	Nintendo	Silicon Knights	Scary in a different sense – very intriguing
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Amusement Vision	Sega does it again with a brilliant retro remake
Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Ubisoft	Natsume	Highly absorbing – the *Animal Crossing* of farming games
Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House	Hard as nails and incredibly addictive
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	Camelot	Golfing fun without the need for Tiger Woods
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	In-House	Another great moment in gaming from Nintendo
Mario Party 5	Nintendo	In-House	Mini-game goodness, whether alone or with friends
Metroid Prime	Nintendo	In-House	A genre-redefining title in every sense
Pikmin 2	Nintendo	In-House	More flowery fun for those of a patient disposition
Resident Evil	Capcom	In-House	Still as scary as it was when it first came out
Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House	The leader of the pack when it comes to swordplay
Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	In-House	Not perfect, but still a very fine Mario adventure
Super Monkey Ball 2	Sega	Amusement Vision	Monkeys and balls – what more could you want?
Tales Of Symphonia	Namco	In-House	An absolute beast of an RPG that will dominate your life
Viewtiful Joe	Capcom	In-House	Looks great, plays even better
Wario Ware: Mega Party Game$	Nintendo	In-House	A party game that'll have you rolling in the aisles
Winning Eleven 6 IMPORT	Konami	In-House	The only essential football game for the GameCube
Zelda: Four Swords Adventures IMPORT	Nintendo	In-House	The perfect excuse to have your friends round all the time
Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House	One of the many reasons to own a GameCube

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

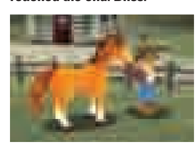
Eternal Darkness
A hugely overlooked survival horror romp that has more than its fair share of scares and thrills.



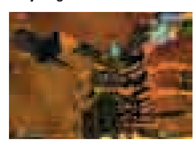
Resident Evil
If, on the other hand, you like your survival horrors a bit more traditional, Capcom's remake is the place to be.



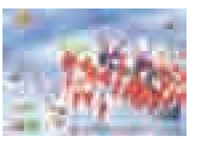
Harvest Moon: AWL
The only game to last us nearly as long as *Animal Crossing*, and we still haven't reached the end. Bliss.



Zelda: The Wind Waker
How can anyone say they hate the look of Link's aquatic adventure? Unless, of course, they've got no taste.



Pikmin 2
More green-fingered shenanigans with the Pikmin, but with even more to do and see. Just what we wanted.









EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

GBA

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 22 June 2001
Media Flash Cartridge **Current Price** £69.99



Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games are now more accomplished and can even be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely SP model is available in a variety of colours.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising	Nintendo	In-House
Astro Boy: Omega Factor IMPORT	Sega	Treasure
Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami	In-House
Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo	Square Enix
Fire Emblem	Nintendo	In-House
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Camelot
Harvest Moon: Friends Of Mineral Town	Ubisoft	Natsume
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	AlphaDream
Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo	Camelot
Mario Vs Donkey Kong	Nintendo	In-House
Metroid: Zero Mission	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Pinball: Ruby And Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Ruby / Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Shining Force: Resurrection Of The Dark Dragon	THQ	Sega
Street Fighter Alpha 3	Ubisoft	Crawfish
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
Wario Ware Inc: Mega Microgame$	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap	Nintendo	Capcom

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

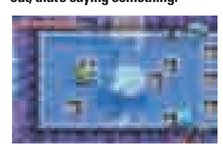
Metroid: Zero Mission
The perfect game to get you in the mood for Samus' bigger GameCube sequel – shame there's no link-up option though.



Fire Emblem
Hard to find, but definitely worth tracking down. Once again, turn-based strategy comes up trumps on the GBA.



Zelda: The Minish Cap
Without doubt the best handheld *Zelda* game yet – and considering *Link To The Past* is out, that's saying something.



PC

Manufacturer N/A **UK Launch Date** N/A
Media 4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc **Current Price** £variable



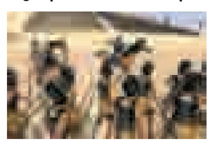
While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

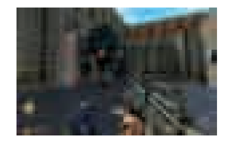
Title	Publisher	Developer
Battlefield Vietnam	EA	Digital Illusions
Call Of Duty	Activision	Infinity Ward
City Of Heroes	NCSoft	Cryptic Studios
Deus Ex	Eidos	Ion Storm
Far Cry	Ubisoft	Crytek
Football Manager 2005	Sega	Sports Interactive
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
Grim Fandango	LucasArts	In-House
Half-Life	Vivendi	Valve Software
Hidden & Dangerous 2	Gathering	Illusion
Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	Novalogic	In-House
Operation Flashpoint	Codemasters	In-House
Pro Evolution Soccer 3	Konami	In-House
Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
Rome: Total War	Activision	Creative Assembly
Sam & Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts
Sensible World Of Soccer	Sensible Software	Renegade
The Sims 2	EA	Maxis
TRON 2.0	Buena Vista	Monolith
Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	Epic Games

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

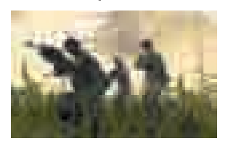
Rome: Total War
The conqueror of all the *Total War* games, bar none. Thousands of soldiers, all at your fingertips. Or rather, mouse tip.



Half-Life
Thanks to the joys of Steam, anyone buying *Half-Life 2* online can enjoy the delights of the original game for free. Yay.



Joint Ops: Typhoon Rising
The latest add-on pack ensures that Novalogic's jungle warfare FPS continues to dominate its numerous competitors.

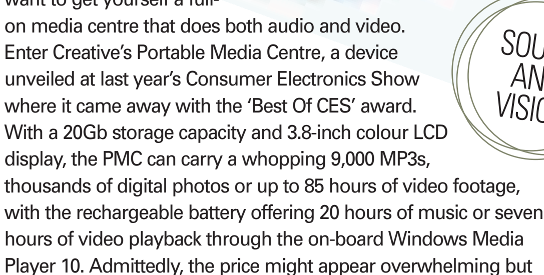


PERIPHERALS

EACH CONSOLE HAS THOSE MUST-HAVE PERIPHERALS. CAN YOU KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF THEM?

PORTABLE MEDIA CENTRE

Console: N/A
From: Creative
Price: £369.99
Available: Now



Portable music is so commonplace now that it's almost going out of fashion – if you want to be truly cutting edge you'll want to get yourself a full-on media centre that does both audio and video. Enter Creative's Portable Media Centre, a device unveiled at last year's Consumer Electronics Show where it came away with the 'Best Of CES' award. With a 20Gb storage capacity and 3.8-inch colour LCD display, the PMC can carry a whopping 9,000 MP3s, thousands of digital photos or up to 85 hours of video footage, with the rechargeable battery offering 20 hours of music or seven hours of video playback through the on-board Windows Media Player 10. Admittedly, the price might appear overwhelming but then considering what it can do it's only right to expect that anyone who wants one will pay over the odds. Those long-distance journeys will never be the same again…

SOUND AND VISION

ZEN MICRO

Console: N/A
From: Creative
Price: £189.99
Available: Now



Small is beautiful, so with the iPod Mini currently wowing the fashion crowd it's no surprise that Creative has also taken steps to reduce the size of its own portable music device, the Zen. While Apple's handheld focuses very much on looks, though, Creative's has a few tricks up its miniature sleeves to best the iPod in other ways. Appearing as a shorter but slightly chunkier alternative, the Zen Micro can hold around 1,250 songs (2,500 if MP3s are converted to WMA format) and offers 12 hours of playback on its removable rechargeable battery. It also has an FM radio built in that can run for 16 hours on a single charge, integrates with Microsoft Outlook thanks to its multiple Organiser functions, and can even be used as a voice recorder to capture hours of recording. Available in ten different colours, the Zen Micro means Apple might have a bit of a fight on its hands.

D500E NOTEBOOK

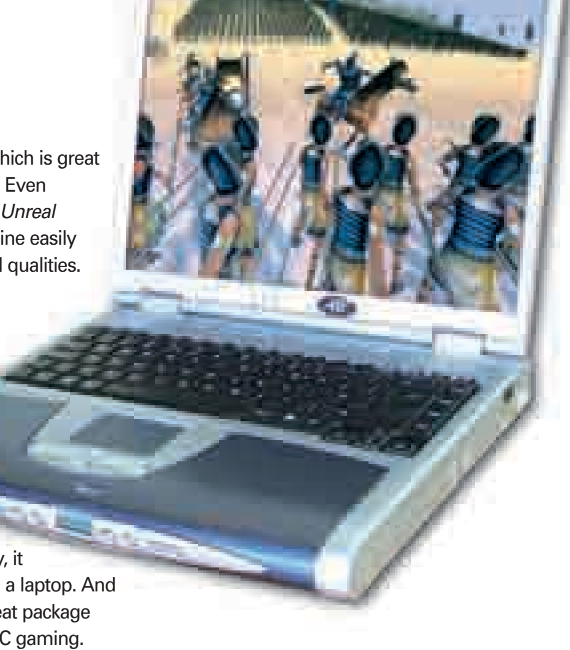
GAMING ON THE MOVE

Console: N/A
From: AJP
Price: £1,249 (plus VAT)
Available: Now

Buying a gaming PC is becoming incredibly easy, if only because more people are choosing individual components and building their own, rather than just picking up packages off the shelf. Unfortunately, the same can't be said for laptops as they usually come as set deals. So if you're often on the move and fancy taking your PC games with you, things get rather difficult unless you buy a specific gaming laptop with the emphasis on processing power rather than which version of Microsoft Works it comes with.

And that's exactly what the AJP D500E is – a gaming notebook with all the focus placed on throwing even the heavyweight games around without straining itself. For a laptop, the base specifications seem more than sufficient for most games to run well: combining the power of a 3.4GHz Intel Pentium 4 processor, 1,024Mb of DDR400 RAM, an 80Gb hard disk and an ATI Mobility Radeon 128Mb graphics card, we can't think of many games that demand more as their minimum specs. The 15-inch TFT display is crystal sharp too, which is great for those looking to show off their games. Even running fast-paced action titles (including *Unreal Tournament 2004* and *Doom 3*), the machine easily handled varying resolutions and graphical qualities.

The D500E also comes with numerous features to keep business types happy – from the built-in fax modem and six-in-one card reader (which can be swapped for a second battery, an additional DVD/CD rewriter or a removable second hard disk at purchase) to the wireless LAN functionality, Bluetooth support and 36-month warranty, it has pretty much everything you'd need in a laptop. And considering the reasonable price, it's a great package for anyone with a preference for mobile PC gaming.




eMag



NEXT MONTH IN GAMES™
With the Battlefield series closing in on the million-sales mark, it's the perfect time to talk about the 'proper' sequel. games™ goes behind enemy lines (well, EA lines) in Sweden for a full hands-on briefing…
ON SALE 30 DEC 04
BATTLEFI



NEXT MONTH

MORE… PREVIEWS

Looking forwards to 2005, there are already plenty of intriguing titles on the horizon. From *Knights Of The Old Republic II*, *The Movies* and *Killer 7* to *Cold Fear*, *Boiling Point* and *Tekken 5*, plus plenty more besides, you won't be left wanting. Honest.

MORE… REVIEWS

Ooh – new formats. We've been waiting for the launch of Sony and Nintendo's new handhelds for a while now, so the thought of reviewing both systems' launch line-ups fills us with excitement. And, of course, there'll be other games too for those who prefer their gaming slightly less portable.

MORE… FEATURES

Not surprisingly, the joys of Christmas have featured heavily on the **games**™ To Do list recently – lots of PR people buying us drinks and generally being nice to us. But that hasn't stopped us jetting off to get some more interesting things for the magazine. Not only are we off to Champaign, Illinois, to meet Volition, and Gothenburg in Sweden for a one-to-one with Digital Illusions, but we'll also be sitting down with id Software to discuss everything *Doom 3*. Combine that with the mother of all hangovers and it'll be a rather interesting month…

Please note: Due to circumstances beyond even our control, we can't guarantee that the next issue will actually contain all these things. But it will definitely have *something* in it. Probably words. And some pictures.

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF gamesTM

Enough of what we think – this is where you get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry

I RECENTLY ENCOUNTERED a bizarre phenomenon that I feel a need to share. I live in a house with five other people, and none of these have shown the slightest interest in gaming.

Normally, when I arrive home from work I boot up a game as everyone else retires for the night… until I began playing *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. The first night I loaded it up I was expecting my housemates to quickly disperse, but after 20 minutes they were still watching, mesmerised by the action.

"Jeez this game is so real! I didn't realise they could make stuff like this!"

"Aren't kids going to be playing this?"

"This is so violent!"

And so on.

At first this annoyed me. All I wanted was to play my game, but then I realised that no other game could have involved my friends in this way. I began to argue that this was a game for adults. I mentioned that if this game was to be played by people under 18, the chances are it was going to happen under the noses of their parents, and in a lot of cases, the game was going to be purchased by the parents.

"How could a parent buy this game for a child?" I was asked, and to me, knowing people who work in game stores, the answer is ignorance. It all comes down to the preconception that gaming is a pursuit for children, whereas it has actually matured (away from the eyes of the masses) into something more.

The initial reaction to *GTA* by my housemates shows this. The general public have no idea how far games have come, so when little Joey asks his uncle (or whoever) for *San Andreas* for his thirteenth birthday, the chances are he'll get it. His relatives won't even register the rating on the box. "It can't be that bad… games are for kids" and besides, the last game uncle played was *Speedball* on the Amiga and that was violent.

The problem lies within the media – the only shows concerning games are aimed at kids (*Gamezville*). The media needs to realise that those who grew up playing games in the Eighties are still playing them. Something needs to happen to elevate gaming from this preconceived status as the preserve of the nerdy teenager.

As for my housemates, they used to take the piss a little because I played games so much. Now they want me to play *San Andreas* every moment I'm around so they can watch! This change of heart was partly due to an article in the *Guardian*, which proclaimed the release of *San Andreas* as a sub-cultural phenomenon, a means by which people who express considered and intelligent morals every day could do things they never would in real life. Now that's the kind of mass-market press gaming needs.

Gareth Williams

gamesTM: Not surprisingly, much of our mail this month has been focused on the release of *San Andreas*; either criticising retailers for targeting youngsters with promotions for the game, slighting Trevor McDonald's *Tonight* show for broadcasting pointless scaremongering or just voicing a general opinion about a topic that raises its head all too often for our liking. Of course, as long as such journalistic bludgeoning and high-street ignorance prevails, videogames are never going to reach that next level of acceptance that film or music

"THERE'S A **PRECONCEPTION** THAT GAMING IS A **PURSUIT FOR CHILDREN**, WHEREAS IT HAS ACTUALLY **MATURED** (AWAY FROM THE EYES OF THE MASSES) **INTO SOMETHING MORE**"

Making Contact

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

games™, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, BH1 2JS

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the internet. Email us at this address: **gamestm@paragon.co.uk**

Alternatively, why not get yourself on our dedicated forum?

Step One:
Get yourself online. It's fairly simple, so we're sure you'll think of something.

Step Two:
Type the following into the browser window: **www.gamestm.co.uk**
You will arrive at the **games™** website. Nice, isn't it? Click on the 'forum' icon near the top of the page. If you're a first-time visitor to the forum you'll have to register before you can post. Just click 'register', fill in a few details (such as a username and password) and you're away.

Step Three:
Ha! There is no step three. It's that simple. Just choose which thread looks most interesting then post your deepest, darkest thoughts (preferably concerning gaming) in there. There's even a dedicated letters thread where you can post anything you'd like to see on these pages.

games™ reserves the right to edit letters for space and/or clarity. The views expressed in letters on these pages are those of the correspondents and not **games™**. If you want a healthy debate, we'll see you on the forum…



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LETTER OF THE MONTH

I GOT INTO work today and faced that old troublesome problem – a dodgy mouse on a bare wood desk devoid of a mousemat.

Of course, I popped the ball out of the mouse and blew in its hole (ahem) to clear it of the office crust that it had developed over the course of God-knows-how-long. But to no avail – it still jammed and I cursed as the pointer bounced irritatingly all over the screen.



And then something hit me. That new copy of **games™** that had got that lovely *GTA* cover with the lady on the back printed in matt might actually work as a good mousemat. Well, I was correct. It does work as not only a good but an amazing mousemat! Thanks for saving me from what could be a very irritating day in the office and commend your arty dudes as people were admiring the art on the back cover.

Craig H

games™: Glad we could be of service, although it might have been nice if you read the magazine first – you know, just out of courtesy for all the effort we put into making it. Perhaps having £100 worth of vouchers will make you show us the proper respect next time.



If you'd like to line your pockets with £100 of Gamestation vouchers then send us a games-related letter crammed with sparkling wit and pertinent points. Extra marks will be awarded for neat handwriting. Marks will be deducted for moaning about Nintendo.

have long since achieved. Still, it's not for want of trying on our part…

ROBERT DE NIRO and Al Pacino are seen as two of the greatest Hollywood actors due to their parts in blood-soaked gangster flicks, yet when you get games that try to replicate their films they get attacked for their violence. We watch soaps and adverts heavily drenched with references to, and scenes of, sex, yet games do not dare venture that close due to the no-holds-barred criticism they would receive. Remember when *Vice City* and *The Getaway* were on the front pages of the tabloids because of their supposed influence on youth culture? These are games that are influenced by scenes that have already been done in films a million times over.

There are millions of people who decide to listen to rap music and play violent action games. Just because you're heavily interested in something doesn't mean you're heavily influenced by it. Why is it that these greasy-haired news reporters and ignorant journalists always try to give bad publicity to games? Let's hope that *San Andreas* is on the news for the amount of copies it sold in one week, not for the amount of controversy it generated.

Abdullah Abubakar

games™: Somehow, we doubt that – anywhere outside the pages of magazines like this one, at least. Unfortunately, it's a case of a very small amount of people spoiling it for everyone else: two people claim to be 'influenced' by a game like *GTA III* when they go shooting people with their parents' guns, for example, and suddenly everyone's at risk. But then, that just leads to an argument about parents taking more responsibility and… well, perhaps we shouldn't get started on that one.

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF games™

Enough of what we think, this is where you lot get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry

Text Life

Game idea: u play a small honest game developer & u work ur way up till u r an evil soulless company who only releases yearly updates. I call it Sim E.A.
games™: Heh, satire isn't dead.

Gta's so damn shallow. Run here, drive there, shoot him, and so on. The game's idea of adding difficulty is 2 add a time limit. What innovation.
games™: The full version of this review originally appeared in *The Sunday Times* on 7 November…

How about a feature about the great videogame crash of the Eighties? And try to find the buried E.T. Cartridges while you're at it.
games™: We were trying to think of an excuse for a trip to America, and now we have it.

Will we evr C HALO on the ps2
games™: Have we taught you nothing? NOTHING? Give us strength…

I was playing Project Zero late at nite,on my own & in the dark.After about an hour I had 2 stop playing.I had a pain in my chest(gulp).Have nt played it again!
games™: Were you eating any deep-fried foodstuffs at the time? That's a likely explanation…

Where's the dawn of war review? I'm sure you could have fitted it into your "jam packed" review section in November? Too nerdy for you? Eh?
games™: It was just an oversight on our part. Sorry. In case you still want to know, however, it's not too bad.

Burnout 3 seriously addictive and seriously flawed. You know it's a joke of a challenge gold is not based on skill in many events. I hate it although have all golds. Tim.
games™: Got all the golds? Then what's the problem? Honestly, there's always one.

I JUST WANTED to say to Lewis Patrick [Contact, issue 24]: what's the big problem with the glut of games at Christmas? It's not as if they're only on sale for a limited period. If you venture to the shops in the new year they'll still be there and they might just cost less, and if you watch carefully as time goes on they get cheaper and cheaper, making the prospect of not feeling like you have to buy things the minute they're released a very financially prudent one.

I buy everything as soon as it comes out (assuming it's something I want) and I end up with shelves of games I haven't got round to playing yet, which is silly because if I waited for them at least they would cost less. We are victims of the market economy – advertising makes us feel as though we have to get things when they come out though it makes no difference to the quality of the experience. The only people who should be worried about release dates are the terminally ill.

Matt

games™: If only we could see things this way, rather than having to buy everything we wanted the moment it hits the shelves (when wages permit, of course). And considering we know more than enough people who share our inability to have a little patience, a slightly wider spread of launches throughout the year would be nice, if only to spare our poor, bruised credit cards. But you're right, it's not like the games won't still be in the shops – and cheaper – in a few weeks or months.

BEFORE I BEGIN, please understand that I love Xbox Live – it's easy to use, it's easy to log in and play (except when it's an EA game), and I've got plenty of friends on Live. But…

Is it me, or is Xbox Live starting to feel like an English pub frequented by Americans and English bitching about each other, and the Canadians explaining they're not Americans?

Also, is it just me or is there quite a lot of swearing, drug abuse and alcohol consumption going on during Live games? On many a gaming night I sit on my beanbag, stick on the headset and I'm on, while many of my fellow players are smoking joints, bongs, weed and discussing it quite openly. What really annoys me is that a lot of these guys normally beat me in games. Performance-enhancing drugs? Hmm. I don't condone the use of drugs in any way, as the Live gamers of today (who keep beating me) will have difficulty using the TV remote control in decades to come.

The amount of swearing is another case. I admit on occasion blurting out expletives when I find my car 'kissing concrete' or getting kicked out of games due to bad server

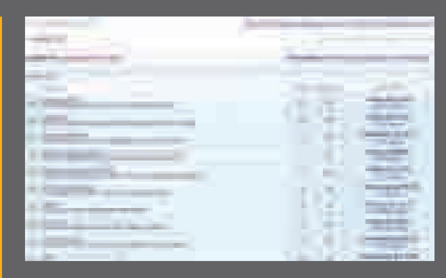


Is Xbox Live like an online pub? Possibly, though we've yet to be offered a knocked-off car radio during *Halo 2*.



Is the Christmas glut of big games a problem? Well, you don't have to buy them all, especially not *Black Monday*.





FROM THE FORUM

TRIPLE-A GAMES THAT YOU JUST DON'T GET

"THERE ARE MANY **EARLY TEENS ON XBOX LIVE** GAMES WHO THINK IT'S SO **COOL TO SWEAR** AND NOT MAKE IT SOUND LIKE THEY'RE USING A **HIGH-PITCHED VOICE MASK**"

connections, but there are many early teens frequenting these games thinking it's so cool to use swear words and not make it sound like they're using a high-pitched voice mask. Just like a pub, these kids usually get kicked out first.

Xbox Live is the nearest thing to a pub (without leaving your home) that any of the console giants could come up with so far. At least the fighting is kept in the games and no damage is done to the premises.

At 36, I'm starting to feel like the old guy who sits in the corner of the pub, complaining about the behaviour of the young ones, but still downing pint after pint because he loves the atmosphere and the whole experience.
Keith Lawler

games™: We sympathise whole-heartedly, particularly when it comes to the rather tense relationship that English and American Xbox Live gamers have. Maybe you should rethink your Live strategy – find some people you want to regularly play with and stick with them, rather than simply venturing into open water and risk hearing the nonsensical witterings of foul-mouthed juveniles and drug-addled stoners? It certainly works for us… or at least, it would if some of our friends didn't fall into both categories at once.

THE MORE I read about the Nintendo DS, the more worried I get about Nintendo's grasp of the current gaming market. Even without the impending arrival of Sony's PSP, the DS would be a bit of a gamble – an odd console with an odd control system and a line-up of quirky games to play on it. Correct me if I'm wrong but don't gaming punters generally ignore the unusual and unconventional?

This time Joe Bloggs might be right. Surely if games could benefit from having two displays we would have had more games that have split their screen in two and I can't think of any recent games that have chosen to do so. The only game that Nintendo has shown so far that suggests to me that there is any worth in the set-up is *Animal Crossing*, the rest seeming a little rushed to say the least.

Even assuming that the DS is worth singing about, commercially it doesn't have a hope. If the PSone can wipe the floor with Saturn, N64 and (arguably) Dreamcast then I can't see the DS being much competition for the PSP. Even a massive discrepancy in price would probably only slow the inevitable.

I want Nintendo to amaze me with its new handheld but it seems to me that the DS is destined to go the same way as GC-GBA connectivity. Nowhere.
Brian Ashford

games™: Mmm, fanboy comments – you can't beat them. Obviously, we can understand the underlying sentiment here, but if you've already made your mind up (which you clearly have, considering your rather pointless PSone/PSP analogy), there's not much we can do to change it. In our eyes, many of the games shown so far for the DS show promise (as you can see for yourself on page 22), and the fact that Sony and Nintendo appear to be pitching at slightly different markets could ensure success for both systems. At least with the overseas launches due right about now, we don't have long to find out whether we're right or not.

Jetman
What so-called triple-A games do you just not get on with? I'll start the ball rolling: *Grand Theft Auto*. I bought *GTA III* when it came out. I'd read all the reviews but for some reason it just didn't gel with me. So I got rid of it. I therefore ignored *Vice City*. However, back in June, I bought the *GTA* box set for the Xbox and thought I'd give it another try. I'm still not enjoying it. I won't be buying *GTA:SA*.

Rick Hard
Halo. I played the whole game through to the end and I found it really boring and monotonous. Most of the levels were exactly the same – just shoot, kill, walk to next section and repeat. It sucked! There's nothing new in this game that hasn't been in other games before. And because the single-player was so bad it put me completely off the multiplayer (although it's probably better) and buying *Halo 2*.

Adam_G
Beyond Good & Evil. People kept going on about how it's an overlooked classic, but I found it really tedious. The pearl collecting was annoying and I just found the whole 'taking pictures' angle just plain dull. Voice acting is nice, though.

AAFIE
Resident Evil (the whole series). This is a deeply kept secret for me, but I am absolutely rubbish at these games. I like the plotlines and the premise, but I for some reason I am so foul at actually playing them that it ruins the whole experience for me. Does anyone else have this problem, or am I just lacking some strange *Resi*-specific motor skill?

Zuton Fever
I personally found *Zelda: Wind Waker* to be a dull game. Don't say it's because I hate cel-shading. I thought the combat was an improvement, but apart from that and the boss fights, I thought it was boring, especially the ocean travelling. Others include *Resident Evil*. It's not a scary game so don't try pretending it is.

Jusatsushi
I got tired of *The Wind Waker* before completion due to the long sailing sections. *Ico* got a little repetitive although I forced myself to complete it and was glad I did as the game shines toward the end. *Final Fantasy X* was the worst *Final Fantasy* game bar none! *X-2* was only a slight improvement. As for *Doom 3*…

g-unit
Don't knock *FFX-2*, it's a good game in its own right and easily has the best combat system of the series. And the story isn't as bad as everyone makes out. Sure, it's no *IV*, *VI* or *VII* but it's entertaining. It's just being different from the norm for once, is that such a crime?

"Die, Allied schweinehund!"

